December, 1970 75¢ MAC

# Galaxy

MAGAZINE

SCIENCE FICTION

NOVELETTE

## DARKSIDE CROSSING

James Blish

## THE MAD SCIENTIST AND THE FBI

Stephen Tall

***and featuring***

ROBERT A. HEINLEIN

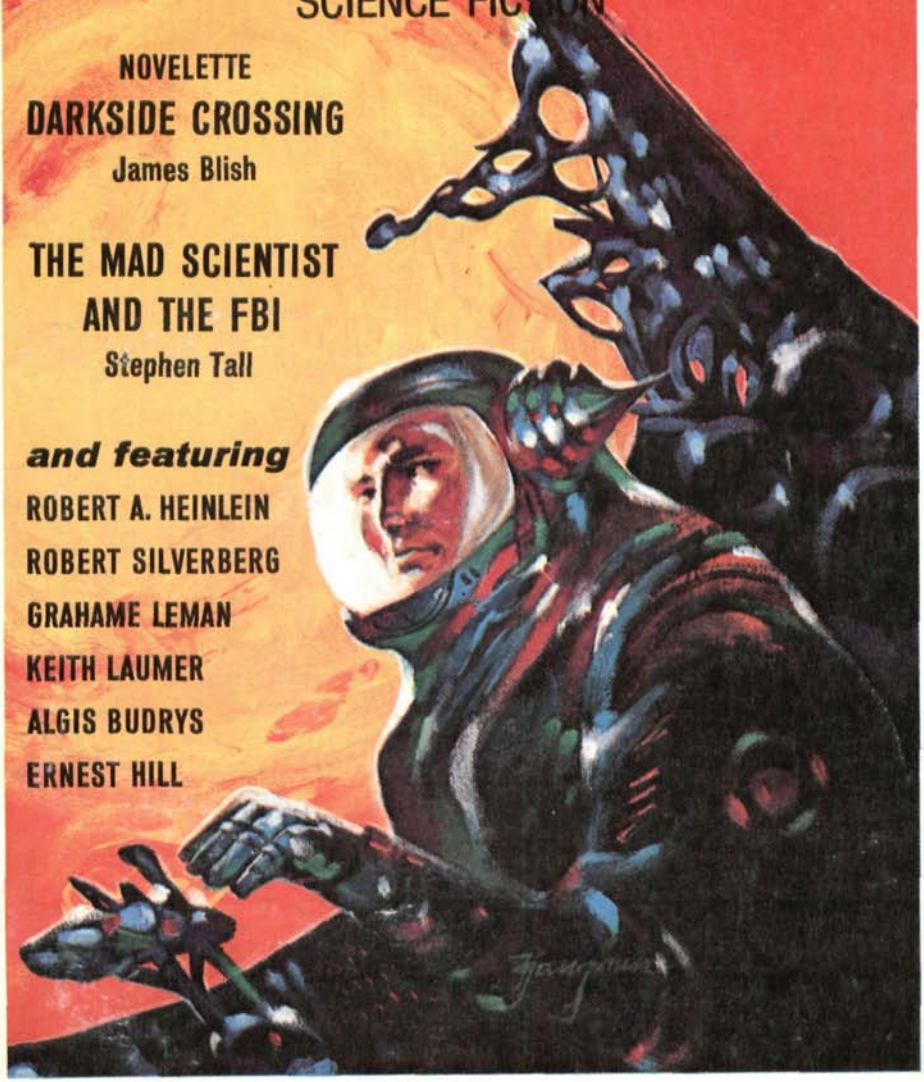
ROBERT SILVERBERG

GRAHAME LEMAN

KEITH LAUMER

ALGIS BUDRYS

ERNEST HILL



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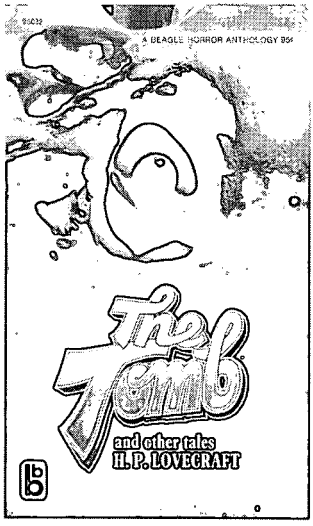


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*Nothing is known of the Old Tongue, except that it was heavily coated.

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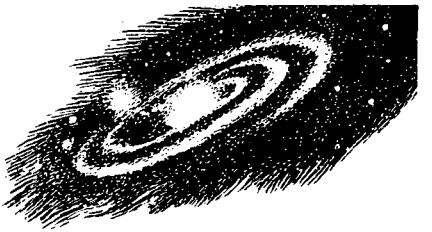
# Galaxy
SCIENCE FICTION

**MAGAZINE**

ALL STORIES NEW



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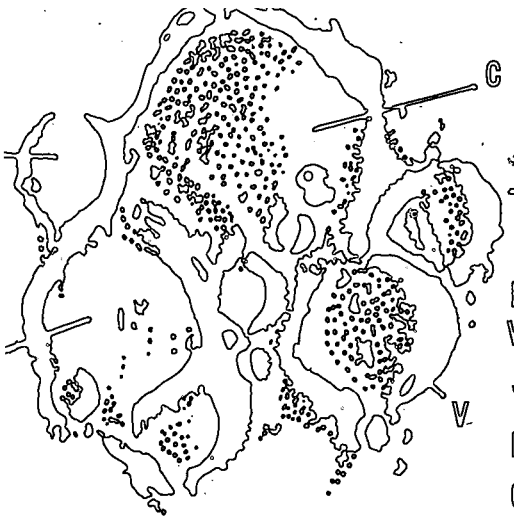


43° N, 154° E

THESE MOON CRATERS BEAR THE NAMES OF:

L —Willy Ley
W —Norbert Wiener, U.S. mathematician, founder of Cybernetics
V —John Von Neumann, U.S. mathematician
P —Joseph L. Pawsey, Australian radio astronomer
C —William Wallace Campbell, U.S. astronomer
Leon Campbell, U.S. astronomer

Willy Ley died suddenly on June 24, 1969. On June 25, Lester Del Rey wrote a masterful summary of Willy's work (*First Citizen of the Moon*, *GALAXY*, September 1969) brilliantly managing to wring from hard and stony facts the flowing essence and meaning of a life without fanfare that affected not only this nation's destiny but, through it, that of humankind.

Dr. Donald H. Menzel, one of Earth's top astronomers, later joined our masthead as science editor and consultant. Don stopped at the office before taking off for Moscow, where he was to chair an international commission designated to name the craters on the far side of the moon.

So Judy-Lynn Benjamin (see masthead) said, "Don—how about a crater named Willy Ley?" Don looked bemused and said, well, he didn't know—many names would be proposed. And how big a name was Willy's after all?

But there was Lester's manuscript, not yet gone to the printer. Don read it—few people knew or remembered Willy's pioneering with rocketry until Lester pointed out its full significance—and when Don had finished he swore: "I'm certainly going to nominate Willy."

And he did. And he fought. And Judy-Lynn launched an information and letter-writing campaign, using Lester's words and her own.

And of 1500 world-famed names proposed for immortality, Willy's was one officially chosen.

Willy's Crater is at 43° North, 154° East, Far Side of the Moon—looking forever outward to stars farther than our sun. Some day you may want to drop in on his place. Don't forget the address.

—JAKOBSSON



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# DARKSIDE CROSSING

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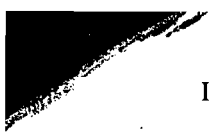

# I

FEELING old and diffident he propped himself naked on one elbow and looked down at Eleanor in the indirect halflight shed from the amber sides of the reading lamp fastened insecurely to the headboard. It was to be, in effect, his last such look, but he felt neither more nor less detached than ever.

Asleep, and with almost all of her makeup kissed off, she still did not look her age, which (her dossier assured him) was forty; but she would no longer pass for the thirty-two she claimed even (though she knew better) to him. Certainly she did not need the defense that somewhere for every woman there is a man, or two—let alone that there is no woman whom most men will not take to bed at least once. No, she was pretty; too blond to be real, too old to be high-breasted, too worn to be worshipped and so on—but pretty, very pretty. Insofar as he could tell (he had never been much of a sensualist), she was sexually both responsive and expert. Furthermore, she had good taste and was moderately intelligent and she would have been a credit to him (had he ever given a damn about social credit).

But he did not give a damn about how he looked to anybody. He had seen himself in newspaper photographs often enough to realize that a remarkably short, slim man with whitening red hair and fading bushy red eyebrows has nothing to be vain about. Had he not been rich, the newspapers and the television cameramen would have passed him over like a stray cat.

He got up quietly and went to the bathroom, where he looked at himself in the long mirror on the back of the door. Cheekbones;



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ribs; pot; shanks; scars; broken toes; no, nothing to recommend him but money. This was no news. And even more certainly, Eleanor was hardly a mistress anybody else would have taken had he been not only the world's, but the world's history's richest man. She was neither a Kennedy nor a Gabor—had probably never even heard of their legends; no family; no power; no symbol of wealth, sex or anything else—except, perhaps, that John Hillary Dane was hardly in any way like any other billionnaire in history.

Poor child. Born in Vienna, she had at sixteen married an Alsatian named Max (who?), a stranded Wehrmacht lance-corporal about whom even Dane's intelligence department had been able to find nothing further. At seventeen she had deserted him to try the Hamburg cabaret circuit—about those years Dane had never asked anybody—where an American naval lieutenant from a good Virginia family (totally investigated; totally uninteresting) had fallen avidly in love with her and had sponsored her immigration, through his Richmond connections, to the States.

The kid had meant to marry her but he never saw her again, though for years thereafter he could have found her—had he known how—in any model directory. Dane himself had picked her from a photograph in a sleazy, only semi-legal magazine called *The Private Swinger*, which specialized (among more gruesome specialties, such as whips and chains) in free listings of women for whom "model" was only the most mailable and the most instantly dispensable euphemism. As far as Dane could be sure, he had been drawn to the photograph only because the nearly nude woman in it looked blurrily pretty, unlikely to want marriage if otherwise provided for, and seemed nothing like his wife.

It worked out fairly well until this pretty but hardened piece of goods had—quite undemandingly—fallen in love, perhaps for the first time in her life and, worst of all, with Dane. At least she said so, and he had no special reason to doubt her. Though he had never felt any real love for anything, he had been through several episodes of that strange cardiac-respiratory madness (once with Jennet) he would have called infatuation, remembered how painful, unwelcome and distracting it had been, and was convinced that Eleanor really did have the disease—and never mind the money.

HE SIGHED, closed the bathroom door just far enough to leave a little light in the room and got back into the bed. Obscurely, he was touched, or at least he thought he was. He did not think



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he was moved. Eleanor was silky and he was full of remote affection for her, but she was not what he had been looking for in the world. Nothing was. He was as yet unconvinced that what he wanted even existed. If it did, he would not know how to recognize it. He could not even put a name to it. Poor child.

She stirred foggily—somehow, even in the deepest, most satisfied sleep, she sensed when he was watching her—and blinked up at him.

"What?" she said.

"I didn't say anything."

"No—but you were thinking."

"The ultimate crime?"

"You know what I mean, John."

Since he did know he did not answer. It was odd, and a little piquant, to hear this *ewig-Weibliche* cliché in her still faintly Viennese accent, as though nothing and nobody had changed since the creation of the Garden. But then, he had had a much better chance to obliterate his own, more outré accent than she had had, and a good deal more incentive, too; for a model/courtesan in America, a slight accent is an article of trade; for a rising young executive, not. The day after his first boss in the United States had described him—with admiration, as he had realized too late—as "a genuine All-Latvian Boy," he had set out to teach himself phonetic, Webster IId International dictionary English; and then had discovered that nobody spoke it. Worse, most Americans mistook it for a phony British accent, or what the British called "Mid-Atlantic," neither one thing nor the other. Now it was too late to revert to his boyhood New Jerseyan, or teach himself Webster IIId—and besides, very soon now, he would be talking only to himself.

She slid upright on the bed, unsuccessfully pulling hair back over her freckled shoulders, and folded her forearms on her knees above the sheet, her breasts depending heavily and somewhat pathetically between her upper arms. Resting her chin on her crossed wrists, she spoke quietly.

"Is this it?"

"Yes."

As always, he did not exactly care; and yet she looked so blowsy and so forlorn in her expensive setting that he felt a paradoxical and quite unexpected tenderness.

He added: "I'm sorry."

"Oh, I knew it was coming. Luck always changes and 'I'm sorry' is no help. If one can say, 'I loved it while it lasted,' one has all one can reasonably ask for."

The particuliar mixture, again, of European fatalism and American cliché. And, of course, of the rituals of what the books called love. Should he feel guilty? He did not know.



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"I loved it while it lasted."

"Perhaps. I know you tried. It's the only part of life I know where trying is the surest way to fail—but never mind."

"It wasn't that," Dane said. "The problem is, I've got to go on a trip—a long one."

"You can't tell me where, I suppose."

"I could—but it wouldn't mean anything to you. Hardly more than a dozen people in the world have ever even heard of it."

Her carefully bleached and shaped eyebrows rose. "I didn't think there could be such a place any more. It must be very small."

"It may well be," Dane said guardedly. "But that's not important. The main thing is, I'm not coming back. Nor am I telling anybody but you that I'm going. I'm just going to vanish."

"Oho. A Shangri-La."

He smiled.

"Something like that. I can't be sure. But once I'm gone a lot of people will be looking for me—and one of them is bound to happen on you, sooner or later."

"I know about your private detectives," she said tranquilly. "But I know how to keep secrets, too, and you know I know. I will keep this one."

"Thank you."

"I hate men who thank me. It makes them seem so abject, as if I'd demeaned myself by taking them on. A proper man ought to take a woman by right, without any doubts of himself."

"I'm sorry."

"There, you see?" she said, lifting her hands and breasts to God. "Somehow that's the kind I always get—either terribly grateful, or terribly apologetic."

"You're very philosophical. I have to be grateful for that."

"I'm furious," she said, weeping abruptly but with open eyes, "and I love you. At least, in God's name, before you go, show me a little honest lust."

ORDINARILY, when an observatory discovers a new celestial object its first act is to telegraph the particulars to Harvard University, the world's astronomical information clearinghouse. Harvard then prints an announcement, which it mails as a postcard to subscribing observatories. In due course the discovery is confirmed—or it is not; if it is, the discoverers write it up in detail, and submit it as a letter to *Science* or *Nature*, both of which are weeklies. If the discovery is of sufficient importance in the editors' eyes, this entire *cursus honoram* need take no longer than two months, despite the world-wide glut of scientific publication.

The Dane Observatory discovery was of sufficient importance, but the station in the crater of Coropuna was no ordinary ob-



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servatory. It was the only one in the world which was not wholly owned by a university or consortium of universities, a foundation or a government, but by one single man. And Dane had issued orders that nothing it found was to be communicated by anybody until he had seen it first. The staff protested, mildly, but secrecy was one of Dane's major ways of making money—and of keeping himself to himself, though under that rubric he called it privacy.

He insisted.

It was perhaps a sign of the times, he reflected, that none of his astronomers chose to resign rather than work under these conditions. The rule was wholly alien to what was supposed to have been the tradition of freedom of information in science; but the tradition had been systematically traduced by the security regimens which had begun to proliferate in the West about 1940, and in the East long before that. By as early as 1970, every major country in the world had its own equivalent of an Official Secrets Act, and nearly every scientist had become resigned to it.

Dane's private counterpart of such an Act was by now only a minor cloud in the general climate, which was one of steadily thickening fog—being steadily further thickened by the spying devices he had either made possible or which his own company produced.

But in view of the discovery itself, his ruling was providential as far as his own interests and drives were concerned. Briefly, Dr. H. Kardon Uscott, his chief of staff at Coropuna, had found that the Sun is a double star.

The Sun's companion, Uscott reported, is a white dwarf star, of about the same size and intrinsic brightness as Proxima Centauri—which had previously been supposed to be the nearest of all other stars to the Sun. But the Alpha Centauri twins are four light-years away from the solar system. The Sun's companion was only twelve thousand times as far from the Sun as the Earth is—a meaninglessly long distance in miles but only about one sixth of a light-year, which is minuscule as interstellar distances run.

The two mismatched stars revolve around a common pair of epicenters in an ellipse, one circuit of which takes 1,300,000 years, so that the proper motion of the dwarf companion against the background of "fixed" stars is only one second of arc per year. Had it been in northern skies, even this would have been spotted by blink-microscope comparison of sky atlases reaching all the way back to the Astrographic Catalogue started in 1887 by no less than eighteen universities—regardless of the fact that there are



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more than nine hundred other stars in Earth's skies which are brighter, every one of them much farther away. But instead, it stood in the sky almost directly above the South Pole, effectively invisible, unmapped, even its proper motion disguised by the precessing of the equinoxes. Until Dane Observatory had become functional it had never even been photographed, let alone suspected to be a companion of the Sun.

Dane's star had risen—and not in the East, but in the ultimate austreal cold.

He was instantly gripped by a desire to see it, but business held him back for more than a year, while his astronomers fretted. Nevertheless, he read the data closely as they were transmitted to him by teletype: mass, 0.07 Sun — brightness, 0.000079 Sun—maximum eccentricity, 0.07—maximum separation from Sun, 13,300 A. U. While he was about it, he checked some other nearby stars—whenever possible under their Roman, Arabic or even Chinese proper names, so that tracing the nature of his interest would be difficult even through a computer. Nan men (Alpha Centauri), Zuarah (Gamma Eridani), and Eta Cassiopeiae were all Sun-like stars and all quite nearby, but they were also members of multiple-star systems, which seemed to rule out planets. For a while he was captured by a single star, about eight percent brighter than the Sun and identified as Delta Pavonis. But he lost interest in it on finding that it is nineteen light-years away; the computer had more grandiose ideas than he did of what could be meant by "nearby."

When at last he was able to fly down to Coropuna, Dr. Uscott was almost at the bursting point.

"I can't begin to tell you how important this is," Uscott said, leading the way along the bitterly chill floor of the faintly echoing dome toward the telescope. The poor man's teeth were chattering like a squirrel's under his breathing mask, obviously as much from excitement as from cold. "Just to begin with, the f-finding that one member of a close double can have a big family of planets throws every existing theory of how solar systems are formed into the discard. Though Beta Solis, as we call it, does also explain the aberrations in the orbit of Neptune, as the discovery of Pluto never did. But there's still more."

They got into the lift which would take them to the telescope's Newtonian focus, where there was a heated and pressurized viewing chamber (the Cassegranian focus could not be heated, since it was directly under the big mirror, which heat would warp).

"What more?" Dane said.

"This dwarf star has at least one planet. Apparently about the size of Jupiter. The implications—"



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Suddenly Dane thought he knew how Toby Walker had felt in the electric chair atop the tower in Denver.

"A planet!" he said tensely. "Will I be able to see it?"

"Oh, no. It's far too faint, though with electronic amplification we might barely be able to get an image or a track of it. We only deduced it from a p-permutation, a wobble in the companion star's own orbital track. But Mr. Dane, the implications—"

"You have no idea," Dane said into his mask, "what the implications are. Show me this star."

II

HE LOOKED at it long and hard, though it was very far from being impressive: a tiny, blue-white spot of light, spiky with the distortions caused by the four supporting members of the telescope's prism, fuzzy with aberration, dancing slightly in the viewing field—seeing was a problem even this high up in the air. No planet was visible, as Uscott had predicted; nor did any appear in the photographs Dane was subsequently shown in the observatory office. But there was Dane's star—close, ambiguous, somehow frightening, and yet somehow also infinitely promising. "You're sure about this planet, Uscott?"

"Absolutely, Mr. Dane. We've


**Ballantine Books**

IN mid-August, in mid-flight to England to meet with other paperback people, I realize that there is not going to be any December column. This is not to keep you from reading, however. Don't miss these wonderful titles for December:

BEYOND THE GOLDEN STAIR
Hannes Bok
ASSASSIN OF GOR
John Norman
TIMEPIVOT
Brian N. Ball

AND here is a list of other top fantasy and science-fiction works published by Ballantine in 1970:

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Richard Cowper

ALL JUDGMENT FLED
James White

RINGWORLD
Larry Niven

RE-BIRTH
John Wyndham

THE ELEVENTH COMMANDMENT
Lester del Rey

NERVES
Lester del Rey

THE YEAR OF THE LAST EAGLE
Leona Train Rienow (with Robert Rienow)

SATELLITE 54-ZERO
Douglas R. Mason

ANOTHER END
Vincent King

Good cheer and best wishes to all . . . **BB**

detected others far more distant, by the same method. The eccentricity—"

"Could there be others?"

"Well, now, there we have a problem. All our cosmological theories have gone out the window as of last year. It's *impossible* for this star to have *any* planets, even a single gas giant. But there it is. (For that matter, in this light, our Sun shouldn't have any planets, either). So—yes, provisionally, there could well be others. We need a lot more research and, even more, we need a lot of theoretical help. When can we send out the announcement?"

That star—Beta Solis—had cost Dane more than forty million dollars; not very expensive as modern real estate values went, but on the other hand . . .

He stacked the photographs and handed them back.

"Never," he said.

DANE could not have said exactly when he had decided to go to the star. It seemed to him that he simply and inevitably assumed that he was going from the moment that Uscott had told him the star might have other planets besides the gas giant; but the decision might lie buried even earlier.

He knew something of the obstacles to the ordinary notion of interstellar flight, in part from his own training, in part from his recent checks with the computer.



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Limited to a slow build-up to near-light speed and an equally slow deceleration as the target was approached, such a trip across even the four light-years to the Alpha Centauri system (Nan men, Hadar, Proxima) would take the better part of a lifetime. Moreover, the energy requirements would be prodigious; the mass ratio of propellant to ship would be somewhere in the neighborhood of a billion to one for any reasonably speedy crossing. Technologically, the thing was impossible now and probably would be for—to be optimistic—a century to come.

But crossing only a sixth of a light-year—two light-months—was another matter, especially if one viewed it as a one-way trip. A little scribbling (for now he wanted to leave no further clues even with the lowliest computer programer or in the machine itself) showed him that it was in principle within reach now.

Suppose, for example, one were to build a fusion-drive ship almost exactly like the *Indefeasible*, the one that had set out for the Saturnian satellité, Titan, in 2002. The design would involve only two essential differences: first, its life-support systems would be totally devoted to one man, not five; and second, all the space and mass saved by this would be given over to propellants.

The *Indefeasible* had reached Saturn's orbit in nine months, decelerating most of the way under solar drag. The same ship under a continuous two gravities of acceleration—which would be no harder on the passenger than living in one of the Dane Tower's express elevators—would pass the aphelion of the orbit of Pluto a little sooner and, in fact, a crossing to the dwarf companion in such a vessel would probably take no more than three years of subjective time, thanks to the Lorenz-Fitzgerald effect. (Of course it would take longer in objective time, but Dane did not plan to come back.)

THE scheme had many beauties. To begin with, no Research-and-Development expense would be required; the *Indefeasible*, now on its way back from the Saturian system, was no longer a pioneering machine, but a collection of hardware down to its last circuit and component, and Dane could put his hands on all its specs without exerting himself overmuch. He did not have to invent it. He could then sub-contract each component, breaking the manufacture of the ship into so many tiny parts that no single sub-contractor would have the faintest idea of what the part he was making was going to be used in—thanks to the phenomenon called technological fallout, spaceship components were con-



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stantly turning up in civilian applications anyhow. Even gross parts like hull plates could be scattered among a multitude of aircraft, submarine and boiler works all over the world, and none of them Dane subsidiaries. It wouldn't even have to be done on a cost-plus accounting system, since no profit was contemplated anyhow.

Fine; nobody would recognize the bits and pieces for what they were. But how could you conceal the assembling of them, let alone the completed object? Clearly the ship would have to be assembled in orbit, not on Earth, which willy-nilly would make it the most conspicuous human artifact since the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World with the Dane Tower piled on top of them.

Conceivably it *could* be assembled on the ground on the Moon, in some unnamed and uninteresting crater on the far side. No, scratch that—the take-off from the Moon would leave a high level or residual radioactivity which would arouse intensive investigation within only a few years. Also, assembly under even lunar gravity, while not outright impossible, would be too expensive.

Well, several dozen communications and weather satellites were in synchronous or "parking" orbits around the Earth, just far enough out—22,300 miles—so they made one revolution every twenty-four hours, thus remaining permanently above the same spot on the ground. Why not assemble his own ship in a twenty-eight day orbit behind the Moon? There were no bases back there; in fact, there were only three on the near side: two American, one Soviet. Any of them, if by any chance it picked up the passage of the vessels containing Dane's parts and crew, would be likely to assume that the unscheduled flight belonged to the other nation. (Better have a Russian-speaker always aboard, to respond if hailed by one of the U.S. bases.) Another plus!

Next came the problem of a staging area on Earth. Another extinct volcano in the Cordillera Occidental was the obvious answer—everyone was already used to his shipping vast quantities of materials down there—and as for the take-offs, well, obviously the observatory staff would have to be in on all this, and who else would see them?

Indeed, now that he came to think of it, the only part of this operation that threatened to be uncontrollably conspicuous was the money. The cost, he was sure from the experience of the *Indefeasible*, would be almost a billion dollars; to raise that he would have to liquidate about a third of his assets and that would be news—the *Wall Street Journal* and the



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*London Sunday Times Business News* would alike front-page it.

But he had another convenient cover: He could reinvest the money in Dane Laboratories, the corporation—ostensibly interested in ethical drug research, with emphasis on longevity—he had set up to disburse the monies for his time-viewing project. That project he would keep going, dead end though he now knew it to be. If the pharmaceutical front were ever penetrated, the revelation of the Future experiments would be sensational and would make a marvelous false pointer to which direction he had vanished in. And he could probably make use of many of the people on the Future project staff, which would cut down on one fraction of the expense—they had *already* been bribed. So, by great good luck, had Toby Walker, the only reporter in the world of whom Dane was actively afraid.

A note: Could that vast, perfect computer he had unsuccessfully tried to have Toby sabotage be copied *in petto* for the starship? If so, it would save a lot of space and weight; and just the attempt to do so—though not for this purpose—was already a matter of record as the chief interest of the Future project.

HE SHOULD, he thought, give some consideration to the future of the firm, because it represented the future of his family. Little enough though he cared now about Jenny and Hank—let alone Jennet—he had loved them once and they were his responsibility, as, for that matter, were the livelihoods of Dane employees. (There were no stockholders; he had bought them out early in the game and neither the parent holding company nor any of its subsidiaries had ever gone public, a situation on which the Department of Justice had made three lengthy, expensive and utterly futile court assaults.)

It would be best to handle this by testament. He already had a reliable general manager, who could be depended upon to keep things going—though not to keep them growing—after Dane's disappearance. In a will he could give exactly half of everything to each of the children—apart from a trust fund for Jennet. It would take ten years for him to be declared legally dead; if in that time the kids had grown up enough to take an interest in the firm, all well and good; if not, the exact fifty-fifty split would prevent them from imposing arbitrary policies upon the manager, since they were at loggerheads about everything almost all of the time. (Hence also the trust fund for Jennet; if he split control into three parts, any damn fool notion, without limit, would command a majority.) They would be protected from another



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antidiversification suit by the government by the massive liquidation of a third of his companies.

It would be wise, he supposed, to try to determine whether or not the dwarf companion had any other planets besides the gas giant—let alone one on which he could live. Of the nine possessed by the Sun and their twenty-three-odd satellites, only one supported life above the bacterial level at all—and the chances that a white dwarf would have a viable world were much smaller.

On the other hand, Uscott had said that there was suddenly no longer any theoretical base or model for planet formation, thanks to their own discovery of Beta Solis. Dane had the distinct impression that if Uscott were to find the dwarf companion to be surrounded by ice cubes, or even fairies, he would be more resigned than surprised. In any event it seemed unlikely that the question could be answered by evidence from Dane Observatory alone, and Dane had no intention of letting Uscott ring in any other observers. He would take the chance; if there was no planet for him when he got there, well, he would at least be shut off the Earth, which he himself had helped to spoil.

Now, about a trust fund for Eleanor . . .

Clearly, the details were going to be knotty, but that was why he employed experts. The first principles all appeared to be sound.

Indeed, he was a little awed at the way all his interests, without any foreplanning on his part, seemed to fit into—and to have been pointing toward—the flight to the dwarf companion. Some familiarity with the sacred literatures of the world might have acquainted him with his predecessors and his prophets, but his early interest in poetry had not lasted long enough; he was now only an engineer and entrepreneur. He was yet to realize that for a god nothing can go wrong in the youth of his power; even his errors are fruitful or can be corrected by deluge of rain, blood, locusts or money.

MONEY is time. By spending somewhat more than the minimal billion dollars Dane got the ship—which, peculiarly, he called the *Tranchemer*, though to nobody but himself—built in a year. The computer project worked out in half that time, so he was able to give himself six months of intensive flight training in a mock-up of the *Tranchemer's* life-support and control chambers which had been constructed on one of the many empty levels of the Dane Tower. He was even once able to visit the secondary staging area in a far-side lunar crater some sportive interpreter of the earliest Orbiter



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photographs had named Alfred E. Neumann (and indeed there is a distinct resemblance); and from there, to go through the then-skeletal *Tranchemer* herself. This was his first trip into space and he found he enjoyed it hugely.

Nothing, absolutely nothing, went wrong. How could it?

It then became time to assemble the family, which did prove difficult. Jennet was of course no problem—she was always conpulsively, obstreperously, naggingly, *there*. But Hank had become the leader of some sort of noise-making group which called itself Sufi Mahound And The Black Goyim; and though despite its strainedly outré name it sounded like every other such group to the nineteenth decibel place and it had proven popular enough to be almost constantly on tour. As for Jenny, she was not hard to locate, since she had settled down to reading what she called "half-Haiku" to another sort of semi-music in coffee-shops in the East Village; but persuading her to attend the meeting was more work that pinning down Hank's itinerary.

When at last Dane did manage to bring them all together they were strangers. Hank, always long and thin, now looked like someone preparing to model as a hairy ghost. Even Jenny looked rather gaunt, though as a teenager she had been on the plump side—but at least she was clean. She had inherited her father's red hair, which she wore very long. Hank's, which was dark brown, was almost equally long and kept getting mixed up with the *crux ansata* which he wore on a neck chain over his buckskin jacket; every so often he would get hair out of his eyes with a toss of the head which in Dane's own youth had been the gesture with which young men said, "I never wear a hat—" as though not wearing a hat were a point of honor.

But they no longer aroused in Dane any emotion but faint distaste. Against the background of the overstuffed and fussy drawing room—Jennet had Edwardian tastes—they seemed like nothing but waifs. Well, it was their own choice.

Dane wasted no time on preliminaries.

"I wouldn't have bothered any of you for something trivial," he said. "The fact is, I'm leaving the business and the country—permanently. You are all provided for; Horowitz and Horowitz are sending you letters giving you the details. There are a number of people who know where I'm going, but you would find it very difficult to figure out who they are—and impossible to get them to talk even if you did identify them."

"Why should we try?" Hank said. "If you've provided for us,



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where you go is your own business."

"Precisely."

"Well, I for one shall certainly try," Jennet said grimly. "I didn't marry to be provided for and, in fact, your damn businesses have been nothing but a burden to me. And I *certainly* didn't marry to be deserted. When I think—"

"You have no choice in the matter. As for trying, it would be fruitless, because I have so arranged matters that it would be physically impossible for you to follow me, even if by some miracle you did figure out where I'd gone."

"You make it sound like you're going on the next trip to Saturn," Jenny said scornfully.

"You might just as well assume that I'm going time-traveling for all it will do you. And Jennet, for your own good, I strongly advise you *not* to try."

"A threat, now?"

"Not at all. When you get the letter from the lawyers, you'll see that it's to your advantage to have me declared legally dead in the minimum possible time. Don't cloud your case by searching for me or otherwise flailing about as if you thought me still alive. To do so would be not only useless but stupid."

"And you expect me to take your word for this?"

"No, not really," Dane said. "But it is my best advice and I'm obligated to offer it. Making the horse drink is up to God, not me."

"I don't think you can tell the difference any more," Jennet said in a voice of rusty iron. "Your notion that you can get away with this sounds suspiciously godlike to me. You've had so much power for so long you think it's infinite now. And you are going to look marvelously silly when I find you bedded down with some starlet in Peru."

Dane grinned. "Ah, you've ferreted out my secret already. Well, I wish you joy of it. But you'd better tell Sam Horowitz before you tell the press. You may find his reasoning more plausible than mine—or anyhow, less suspect."

"Hey Dad, is that really all there is to it?" Hank said, with visible disappointment. Dane was momentarily startled by the *Dad*, until he realized that it was a standard term of address in Hank's present circles.

"Sorry, Hank, but I'm answering no questions and dropping no clues," he said. "Assume anything you like. Even an accurate guess wouldn't change anything in the slightest."

"—God said," Jennet added.

The meeting, inevitably, went on for quite a while longer, and became increasingly more painful; but at this point, since Jennet had inadvertantly had the last word, the Recording Angel switched off his tape.



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Now, to say goodbye to Eleanor.

## III

MASKED by the Moon and by the inherent invisibility of rocket exhaust in space, the *Tranchemer* began to move under its own power. In his control couch, John Hillary Dane could hear nothing but a vague whisper, transmitted along the hull—the noise of the engines, as well as the torrent of hard radiation they produced, were separated from the life-support sphere by more than a mile of storage modules, most of them airless until he should need to enter them—but he could feel the thrust mounting, all right.

It was welcome; he had spent the last frantic ten days of preparation in free fall, except for brief workouts in the centrifuge chamber. His designers had considered locating the entire life-support capsule along the rim of a centrifuge, as the designers of the *Indefeasible* had done; but the crew of the Saturnian expedition had reported that the nausea produced by moving about under the Coriolis forces involved had been so much worse than the effects of free fall itself that they had kept the centrifuge shut off for most of every ship's day. Dane would just have to get used to free fall, for he was going to spend a substantial part of three years in it, with only enough time in the small centrifuge to maintain his skeletal muscle tone and to prevent calcium from being leached out of his bones. At the moment, though, the return of the equivalent of gravity—even though it did make him feel as though he were lying on his back—was a pleasure.

Solemnly elated, he touched a pre-programed trigger on the computer console. Immediately in his foam-padded earphones the whisper of the engines took on tonality; it was joined by a high violin tremolo on E flat, and then by a distant horn call in rising and falling fourths—the opening of the Fourth Symphony of Anton Bruckner, suitably subtitled *The Romantic*. Within a few minutes, Herr Bruckner was making so much noise that the engines were swamped out entirely.

The thrust, however, grew much faster; long before Herr Bruckner had gotten to his second theme (though since his first themes tend to come as groups of three, his seconds do not show up in any hurry), it had reached the prescribed one gravity—which was even a little unpleasant after ten days of no gravity at all. But it would not last long. He had discovered early on that his snap estimate of the acceleration he would need, and its duration, had been fantastically too high—which was lucky, for had his original guess been correct, no ship conceivable in the present



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state of the art could have been built to deliver it. What was achievable was an average relative velocity of 9,455 miles per second, which at one gravity of acceleration would cost the *Tranchemer* three hours, thirty-four minutes and twenty-five and a fraction seconds of thrust.

Needless to say, Dane was not planning to travel at anything like that clip inside the dusty, littered solar system—or expend the energy needed to attain it, either, this close to the only home of Man. Instead he planned to run the engines at one gravity inside the solar system for only one hour, thirty-five minutes and eight seconds, and even there only in short bursts. The rest of the requisite velocity—which meant almost all of it—would have to be picked up later, when the *Tranchemer* was far beyond both the environment of Man and the possibility of detection.

From several points of view, of which comfort was the least important, it would have been better to have left the Moon under nine gravities and put in correspondingly more coasting time later. The present trajectory would take the *Tranchemer* once across the near side of the Moon, a crossing during which she was sure to be spotted by radar by one of the bases and perhaps even visually as well. But that couldn't be helped; Dane could only hope that the transit would be written down as a story of saucer sighting. The synchronous orbit in which his ship had been built was necessarily in the plane of the ecliptic; whereas she would eventually have to be traveling at ninety degrees to that plane, and her mass was so great—and her distribution of it so barbell-like—that she could not be wrenched into the new direction in a hurry without snapping somewhere along the bar.

As Herr Bruckner reached his third theme, his usual and here again uniquely appropriate binary one, the Earth appeared over the limb of the Moon, a vivid blue globe about the size of a pea held at arm's length. It would soon become much larger, for the synchronous orbit actually passed closer to the Earth than it ever did to the Moon and the *Tranchemer* was widening its distance from the Moon every second now. That was perhaps a protection; at that distance the ship would be difficult to spot by accident from either the Earth or the Moon.

The Earth duly grew. By the time Herr Bruckner, a notoriously long-winded composer, had gotten to the absolute end of his symphony, Earth was a stupendous and beautiful sight. The computer, as instructed, gave Dane five minutes of silence (except for the engines) to contemplate it and then began to pour into the earphones something even more long-



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winded, the Second Symphony (subtitled *The Resurrection*) of Gustav Mahler. Herr Mahler was also much noisier; if any challenges were coming in—or any parting words from Dane's associates—neither Mahler nor the computer would let them through.

The swelling of the Earth would have given Dane the illusion that he was on his way home, had he considered the Earth home any longer. He did not. He watched the beauty expand with an abstracted mind. In due course the symphony came to an end in a tumult of orchestra, organ, chorus and bells, and by then Earth was receding and Dane had his heavy back to it.

No more music now. Unlocking his chair from the floor, Dane drove it along its tracks to the food output of the console, which extruded at him tournedos Rossini, a baked potato with sour cream and chives, artichoke hearts, a garlicky tossed salad, an athelbrose bombe and a fast-dripping pot of espresso, all oriented to the thrust of the engines—his farewell dinner and one of a kind he would see no more than six times a year henceforth. As he tackled it, the computer began to read to him something he had always meant to read himself but had never had the time to, what with business and keeping up with the technical literature (the computer's library consisted almost seventy-five percent of such works):

*Jemand musste Josef K. verleumdet haben, denn ohne dass er etwas Böses getan hätte, wurde er eines Morgens verhaftet . . .*

He fell easily in with the language, in which he had always been fluent. The Earth of its origin fell increasingly away and by the second chapter he found that he was not thinking about the Earth any more—or anyhow, not so often.

LIKE most laymen, when Dane had thought about the solar system at all he had thought of it in terms of those spurious "maps" which are printed in popular magazines, showing the orbits of the planets as a series of close concentric circles, with the planets themselves neatly arranged outward from the Sun in a straight line. The reality, even though he was looking down on it, was very different: a sea of stars in which the planets were only other sparks, lost in vastness and impossible to identify without the aid of the computer, and those beyond Saturn not visible to the naked eye at all. He had learned to expect this but after a lifetime of unconscious acceptance of the usual simplistic schematic, it was nevertheless disorienting.

By a large coincidence the *Tranchemer's* great arc away from the system did not become sharply inflected away from the ecliptic until it passed the orbit of Saturn,



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and the planet was nearby at the time—near enough, at least, so that the ship's image amplifier was able to bring in a spectacular view. Dane studied it for several hours as it, too, dwindled. It affected him in a way he would have found hard to describe. The Earth, to be sure, was beautiful from space—and had a special beauty as an oasis of life—but Uscott had said that there were probably many other such in the galaxy, and indeed Dane was staking his life on there being another a good deal less than a lifetime away. But *this* great, frozen, poisonous storm of a planet, colored in a thousand shades of straw and surrounded by gossamer rings of broken ice and dust, might well be unique. Leaving it behind was somehow more forceful a symbol of his abandonment of his home system than leaving the Earth had been.

In its honor he had the computer play him the Saturn movement from Holst's *The Planets*; but in the face of the real glory of the real globe the music seemed so cheap that he ordered the crystal wiped. This was unfair to Holst, who had never intended to depict any actual planet—his suite was instead a sort of requiem for astrology—and Dane instantly regretted his action—but the thing was irrevocably done. He would have to learn to be less impulsive, or such flashes of irritation might expunge his entire library before the trip was done. He called for the *Missa Solemnis* next, and to this great requiem, which nothing could cheapen, the ringed giant passed out of his ken except as another spark, which in turn faded away . . .

Odd other crochets cropped up. He had always thought of himself as a solitary type despite his record as an executive *non pareil*—as, in fact, a sort of latent introvert; one of the minor attractions of the voyage had been the prospect of absolute solitude, of absolute freedom from all obligations and interruptions, even the maddening and ubiquitous telephone. By the time he had left Saturn behind, however, he found that he was talking to himself a good deal. Oh, the computer could talk but its responses were stereotyped; it always gave the same reply to the same proposition; it could speak but not conduct a conversation, unless one wanted to argue logic with it, a pastime for which Dane was not well equipped by training. His monlogues at least sometimes had the virtue of surprise.

SOME distraction was provided by the return of gravity, for with the solar system now spread out behind him, he was still only making slightly better than 171 miles per second—a tremendous pace compared to any interplanetary velocity ever achieved before, but still nowhere near what



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he needed for the major crossing. But this time there was no reason to apply the acceleration in short bursts, since all the necessary course corrections had now been made; the remaining velocity could all be piled on at once, and that was what the computer was programed to do. After one hour, fifty-nine minutes and eighteen seconds, the engines shut off again and he was back in free fall and the contemplation of his own state of mind. He would not get any diversion from that source again for the next thirty months.

Nevertheless, the sudden marked change in his environment, brief though it had been, helped him to get back to something resembling his normal frame of mind. Then, about six weeks later, just as he was congratulating himself upon having come to terms with his sentence and even beginning to resume enjoying it, he had a shock that he had utterly failed to anticipate. By this time he was more than forty astronomical units from the Sun—more than the mean distance of Pluto, though in a quite different direction. In complacent celebration, he looked back at the solar system for a last time—

—and found that he had lost the Sun.

Of course, the computer could find it for him. At this distance it should be the brightest star in the sky, almost like a distant but still intolerable arc-light; and from this angle it was being sought among the thinning stars toward the edge of the galaxy, since the *Trachemer* was going approximately in the direction of the galaxy's center. In fact, once the computer had located it, the image amplifier probably could still make a recognizable disc of it.

But to the uninstructed, naked eye it was gone and that was what counted. The lone star that had spawned Man's home was now only a bright dot among thousands of other dots; no longer Zarathustra's and Mithra's great object of worship, but only a grain of incandescent sand on a remote, permanently dusky beach.

Dane was expatriate, as no man had ever been before—nor would he ever see that Sun again.

No such conscious chain of thought about the matter passed through his mind, however, until much later. Upon the discovery itself he was abruptly in the grip of an acute panic. His knees turned to jelly, his fingertips and lips tingled, his soul was filled with dread and he was fearfully dizzy—no, not dizzy, for the cabin did not seem to be swimming—but overwhelmingly he needed to lie *down*. Clumsily—for he had lost almost all control of his body—he swam into the womb of the centrifuge and to the hammock; and there he passed out, almost before he could hit the starting switch.



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HE AWOKE feeling absolutely normal, except that he could not remember who he was, where he was, or the names of most of the things around him; nor did this produce in him any emotion greater than a mild curiosity. Only a long-established reflex prevented him from killing himself by trying to leave the centrifuge before turning it off.

He floated into the control chamber as compulsively and as mindlessly as a sperm going home. He was startled, finally, when the computer spoke to him—though all it said was, "Menu?"—despite the fact that he could think of no good reason why a room should not talk. The startlement got him started asking questions.

The computer was both a good and a bad interlocutor. It could inform but it could not lead; certainly it was not programed for psychotherapy. As a result, after several days Dane had most of the facts, both major and minor, back in his head, but he could not be said to be in possession of them. They had no rank order, no importance, no relevance to the creature he had become. And the computer knew nothing at all about all that part of his past which therapists call "formative."

This fugue and amnesia, he later figured out, lasted nearly six months and was perhaps a lucky episode in a way, for relearning even simple facts kept him as preoccupied and happy as a child who has just discovered that there are more than fifty Oz books, for almost the whole period. Coming out of it into the real universe was painful and he was never sure again that he quite completed the journey. His only test for the firmness of his grasp upon anything was how painful it was, which in the human condition is perhaps the best test, but he remembered dimly that there had also been such a thing as joy, of which he never recovered anything more than the word itself.

Some other changes also became evident. As Eleanor probably had known—or would have agreed, had the thought been new to her—Dane had never been much of a sensualist, but he had cold-bloodedly provided for his inevitable needs with a library of pornographic films (on hot tapes or crystals—the definition would have been too poor) which he had planned to use sparingly, whenever the problem could no longer be ignored. He had even allowed for the law of diminishing returns by having the films graded by two experts, one of whom had been his own personal clinical psychologist. He found now that even the most orgiastic of these had no effect on him . . . and what was perhaps worse—though this was only a guess on his part—neither did the mildest, in which the "consorts" showed some tenderness toward



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each other in addition to the meaty coils of their "relationship."

He was, he concluded tentatively, no longer quite human. The conclusion was tentative because he no longer remembered whether or not he ever had been.

At the end of the first year the apparent magnitude of the dwarf companion was +2. It did not occur to him to ask the computer the apparent magnitude of the Sun.

By the end of the second year the computer was able to report that the dwarf companion had at least five planets—another blow to the chops for the cosmogonists. Three of these were gas giants, one of them—the one whose existence Uscott and his crew had deduced—now plainly separated from the companion's glare in the amplifier image. It had thirteen satellites, all of them dead losses. The other two were dense inner planets but could be called Earthlike only by the most rarified of theorists: one was too far away from its primary to be warm enough for liquid water, and the other was ten thousand miles in diameter and returned a spectrum with only one absorption line—carbon dioxide.

Dane was not dismayed. He was rediscovering Mozart and had just gotten up to *K. 361*. None of this music seemed to have any emotional content—though, judging by the rest of his library the man he had once been must have thought it did—but the technical perfection of even the small works, e.g., the piano pieces for four hands, was staggering.

Six months later Dane had found his planet and three months after that, the *Tranchemer* swapped ends and began to prepare an orbit around it. No wonder it hadn't been visible before; it was less than six thousand miles in diameter and only forty million miles from its feeble, collapsing star. But it would do; it would do very nicely.

Only mildly elated, the creature which had been John Hillary Dane in some past broke out of storage the dove-shaped child of the *Tranchemer* which would be his landing craft and began to prepare his epiphany. In his earphones, from the earth beneath, he could already hear voices speaking in tongues.

"Goodbye," Eleanor said in the blackness.

"Goodbye, my dear."

"John . . . your Shangri-La . . . is it really so far away?"

He kissed her for the last time. "It is years away," he said. "And in Time, every single *second* is more than a hundred and eighty-six thousand miles."

The door closed between them, and that was that. He was not good, among other things, at parting speeches. A very long time later, Toby Walker, who had a fix on *Macbeth*, was to say that nothing in his life so ill became John Hillary Dane as the leaving of it.★



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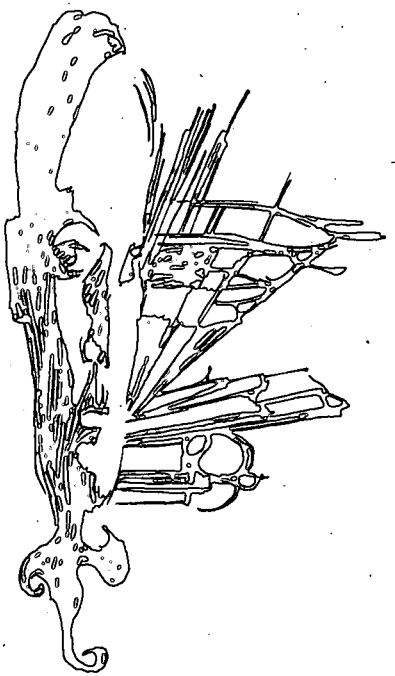
# THE STENTH DI-MENSION



ERNEST HILL

**You'll never see a ghost if you can't see one sideways!**

THE sculpture should not have been standing where it was, with no significant attempt at display. In an alcove, dimly lit. Mottled paper peeled from the rough cement rendering of walls under a cracked plaster ceiling. The marks of a rat's gnawing showed on the soft, worm-eaten woodwork on a forward angle where the floor and skirting met. He cleared a way through the heaped-high rubbish littering the studio floor to a point where he could stand at a proper distance to take in the whole. *Stoa*, by Albertin. A porch—not that the title would signify very much. Philosophers had sat on a stoa and become stoics. Albertin had probably never heard of them. Albertin had made no move to greet or welcome him. He had stayed where he was, squatted, hunched in the



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windowseat, staring out into the darkness. A clock was ticking somewhere or rain was dripping rhythmically through a leaking roof. A scurrying of mice under the dilapidated floor broke the otherwise total silence.

"It is an interesting work," Map Tonquille said, at length. "I should like to see it in the round. From all sides, so to speak."

"Who's stopping you?" Albertin growled.

Albertin was stopping him. Albertin was stopping him by sitting there, a beer can in his hand, and making no effort to help drag the two-meter-high bulk out from the alcove. *Two meters high, one meter deep . . .* He hesitated, chin in hand, reflecting, casting a second, speculative glance at the object in the alcove. *Stoa*, by Albertin. Was it two meters high? A moment before it had seemed to be just that. The curled head-scrolls were just clear of the ceiling—and the ceiling was around two meters—two meters ten high. But were the head-scrolls there, just below the yellow, smoke-grimed plaster, or were they much lower? Were they head-scrolls at all? They had seemed to be something like that, curlique-ing inward and downward—or upward and outward? And then again, suddenly, they were flat planes. The whole elevation was a succession of black flat planes, interleaving, shuffling themselves like a pack of opaque—transparent—translucent—misty gray cards.

They were not, of course, moving, the planes, the cards. Albertin would never have stooped to the mechanical devices so much a part of the last *fin de siècle* vogue—the electro-mechanical school. The planes—the scrolls—the windmilling pale-grained, gray-veined protuberances were static, as unmoving as the columns, steps, angled doors and intricate lattice work of the interior. The semblance of movement was a trick of the concealed lighting although the light sources themselves would also be static. It was indeed quite ingenious. A trick of the angling. A bringing together of a succession of optical illusions confusing the eye and the brain behind the eye. A conjuring with emotion through a visual and mental paradox.

He gave up the idea of dragging the sculpture out into the open. There was nothing to hold on to. Nothing you could be sure was really there, or at least in the same place where a moment before it had seemed to be. He stepped farther back and considered what, if Albertin's positioning could be trusted, would be its frontal aspect. As a striking example of the art *nouveau*, Stoa could hardly be equaled. But then, no one had ever equaled Albertin even in his cruder metallo-morph period. Albertin was, in any period, unique.

"Interesting," Tonquille said



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again. "As an example of the art *nouveau*—"

Before he could finish Albertin leaped down from the window-seat, his thin, sloping shoulders drawn back and his disproportionately large, workman's hands clenched and raised in some sort of invocation. He hurled the beer can to the ground, stamped on it and kicked it toward a corner cluttered with half-finished objects in wire, glass, plastic and indeterminable materials.

"What did you say?" he shouted.

"As an example of the art *nouveau*—"

"You poor, fat, little tick!" the sculptor roared. "What do you know about art *nouveau*? What the hell do you know about anything?" He threw himself against the wall, his hand shielding his eyes, prepared, quite probably, to be sick.

"Very little." Map Tonquille smiled as he answered the question. "But enough to recognize a work of art when I see one. Enough to be aware of current trends—"

"Art *nouveau*!" Albertin spun around and thrust his big hands into his smock pockets and collapsed into the only article of furniture that might possibly, a long time ago, have been referred to as a chair. "What's art *nouveau*? There's only one art, you indescribable, patronizing pig. What the hell's new about it? Art—yes. Genius—yes. Driving me mad. Be driving you mad if you had eyes in your bald baby head. New, my backside! It's as new as the dodo."

"Possibly. It does however show an understanding of present-day choice of materials, new colors, lighting and an insight into a facet of human psychology that would have been impossible, for instance, to Praxiteles."

"Bloody art *nouveau*!" Albertin snorted. "The first little Cro-Magnon man who rubbed red ochre into his bison was bowled over by every shaman in the valley shouting and throwing up his muddy paws and bellowing 'art *nouveau*!" Get out of my sight!"

"I should be prepared to consider purchasing if you would name your price."

ALBERTIN was on his feet again, lurching to a cupboard hidden behind stacks of plastic materials and spools of wire. He fought his way through the obstruction, picking up sheets and strips an armful at a time and hurling them into any vacant area that seemed in an arbitary way suitable.

"Price?" he shouted over his shoulder. "What's price? Want a tag on it? Want to pay at the door and get your change and wheel it away in your little wicker basket? You make me sick."

"Nevertheless—" Map Ton-



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quille smiled— "since I want to buy your work I must know its price."

Albertin was stooped, rummaging in the cupboard and Tonquille noticed with a sudden wave of sympathy how very thin the man was. The outline of his spine showed, too knobby, against the overlarge smock where it arched beneath the shoulders and his long, scrawny neck craned out from the bulge of the rucked-up collar like a wine bottle from a waiter's napkin. He turned with a beer can in his hand and pulled off the tab with his teeth.

"Why ask me?" he growled. "You're the connoisseur. You know all about price and tags and value and all that crap. I only know about worth. What do you pay for genius now on the open market? Ten dollars an hour for inspiration and five for stringing the thing together? That's what your sort paid for Van Gogh until he died and you all made your fortunes out of him. What do you pay for Van Gogh these days? Ten million dollars? Christ! If he heard you bidding for him now he'd cut his other bloody ear off."

"I do not collect archaic painters," Tonquille explained patiently. "And I have really no idea of the price paid for the gentleman to whom you refer. It is your work I am interested in acquiring."

"You are interested in acquiring?" Albertin put the can to his lips and his Adam's apple rose and fell steadily. "Yeah," he said, at last. "Interested in acquiring. That's a handy mouthful. Interested in acquiring means you'll buy if the price is right and you won't if it isn't. Genius must take its turn with the groceries. "What the hell do I care!" he shouted suddenly. "I hate the damn thing. Take it away! I don't want it."

Map Tonquille walked to the window seat and sat with a careful straightening of his trouser creases. He took out a checkbook and deliberately began to write.

"I shall be fair with you, Albertin," he said. "Since you have obviously no commercial sense, I am paying you what I consider to be a fair price. A hundred thousand dollars."

"You're robbing yourself," Albertin growled. "What do I want with your money?"

"You will want to stay drunk for quite a time. My money will help you there. One has to be moderately rich to savor the full immoderation of artistic poverty. When it is all gone, you will begin to work again and I shall come back and quite possibly find the right words to name your new period."

Albertin glowered at him for a while, his bloodshot eyes smoldering under the jut of the bushy eyebrows, his high-domed, narrow forehead checkered with a pucker-



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ing of thin upward and deep transverse wrinkles. Suddenly he grinned, dived into the cupboard and held out a Scotch whiskey bottle.

"You're not a bad little tick," he said. "Have a drink!"

Tonquille shook his head.

"Take the check," he said, "and have this—this masterpiece delivered to my private apartments in Chelsea New Town Block."

"Delivered?" Albertin snorted. "What do you think I am—a moving man? Take the damn thing yourself."

"Since I am paying a hundred thousand dollars I should have thought . . . But no matter. I will arrange for it to be collected later tonight. It is perhaps as well. This object—this *Stoa*—needs careful and professional handling."

He turned again and studied his purchase. The perfect blending of the uncountable optical illusions among the planes was a sheer delight. It was impossible for the eye to focus on any point of the interior, which seemed to be in constant movement, apparantly causing the sides to bend and bulge—one moment they were solid, square and green and the next, hazy purple, rounded and rolling with the undulation of prairie wheat in a wind. Sometimes the whole seemed to rotate about a central axis, giving the impression of unfathomable depth, an illusive rotundity, an infinitely dark central cone. And in the cone a figure, growing steadily out of a lightening of the black homogeneity was also slowly rotating in the reverse direction. A human figure. A woman in black with—was it a poke bonnet? High, rounded and drawn in under the chin, secured with a broad bow. Anti-clockwise turning. Black on gray. A widow in widdershins.

"You know what you've got there, don't you?" Albertin was back in the window seat, a half-empty Scotch bottle in his hand, sober and suddenly sardonic. "You'll never live with it."

"No," Map Tonquille said slowly. "I don't know what I've got. I am only a collector. A rich man who can afford the time and the money to learn. I don't know what I've got. But I shall study it at length and feel something in the end of its true significance."

"You don't say?" Albertin was bantering but less hostile. "When you've found out all about it, come and tell me. I never felt a thing myself that made any sense. Just for now—what do you think it is?"

"A work of art."

"Yeah. I suppose you could say that. I never found out what art was either. What sort of work of art?"

"Sculpture, of course, in the modern idiom. The disposal of the planes and lighting confuse the eye, creating a certain illusion—"



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"The planes and the lighting, you think?"

"There is more?"

"I don't think you've quite got the hang of it, little man. Optical illusions—yeah. I guess that's what I've put there. I never really know. But why are they illusions? Why can't your eye follow something you could measure with a ruler and a photometer and any other gadget you happened to have in your pocket?".

"You are about to tell me, I think?"

ALBERTIN, Tonquille noted, was never as sober as when he had been drinking heavily. His surly bellicosity had left him and he seemed genuinely troubled, as if wrestling with a real physical problem rather than with the obscure images of some artistic inner enigma. He began to pace the studio, kicking moodily at any bric-a-brac that came within range of his heavy-soled canvas boots. Ruffling his fingers through the thick, upstanding mop of his gristled, black hair. Running his thumb around the collar of his smock and the paint-daubed, dirty and collarless shirt beneath.

"Know about dimensions?" he asked at last.

"I don't quite follow you?"

"Dimensions. How many are there?"

"Unless the entire world has been very sadly misled, there are three."

"You think only three?" He stood stock still, his back to the window and the sporadic flush of some distant, on-and-off-diffusing neon-sign behind the night. Staring at the short, pudgy figure of the buyer he counted slowly, one, two, three on his fingers as if not quite sure of the visual significance of numbers.

"There are more?" Map Tonquille asked.

"Your eye and your brain create their own dimensions. I believe there are no such animals. Physically and in real terms, there can't be. No breadth, no length, no height. They are the illusions we create to give us something to hold on to. A plausible artifice we have invented so that, God help us, we can understand a little measure of the un-understandable."

Map Tonquille glanced quickly at his new purchase. It was rotating again. Mouth-shaped. Two broad, puffed-out lips turning, the woman poised between them—or over them. A savage mouth with a bone through its savage nose. The woman smiled at him. The lips closed. There were only the planes. Black and gray planes shuffling. Lights on a film of porous sponge steel. Blades. A saw-toothed zigzag of steps rising to a summit that was again its base.

"I don't quite follow you."

"Listen. What is the world, the



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universe made of? Atoms? A basic hydrogen atom? And what is a basic hydrogen atom made of? It's something we call energy which is as good a name as any other for something we know nothing whatever about. What is energy? Has it got dimensions? Can you go out into the universe past the last galaxy and say 'Up to this point we got energy, further on we ain't? It's so high, so wide and this much deep?' Listen! Listen, little man! We—you and me—we are only modifications of the same stuff that surrounds us—it doesn't even surround us, because that implies dimensions—it just is and we just is, too, a part of it. Inside us, trapped, is something else, an eternal something that hasn't got any dimensions either. It's got power but it's different from the energy past of us. It uses its power, its self-awareness, to become extra aware. It can't take in infinity because, unlike energy, it's finite, it just can't comprehend infinity. So what does it do? It divides eternity up into manageable cubes. It finds three ways of looking at the same thing."

"Four—if you take in time."

"Oh—claptrap! Time isn't a dimension in this sense. If the little beast inside you were timeless, it would be infinite, too, and wouldn't need to cut up the cosmos into cubes. And if it had no duration it wouldn't exist at all. It divides the timeless infinite into cubes it can look at three ways and it moves downtime in a straight line, cubes an' all. Maybe it'll manage four ways one day but it hasn't gotten that far yet."

"You may be right," Tonquille conceded. "But I don't see where it gets us. If our three dimensions are just our way of looking at the whole—it's the only way we've got."

"How dense can you get?" Albertin groaned, striking his fist into the palm of his hand. "Don't you see the relevance of all this to my —my creation? That thing there? Don't you see that if we, the human race, divide up infinity into any three dimensions that suit us, the three we've evolved quite arbitarily, quite by chance, like everything else—don't you see that countless other beings are doing the same thing—dividing it up neatly into three? Don't you see that these dimensions must overlap everywhere? We are all, we who house these little finite beasts, all one big unity. You are just as much a part of the constellation of Ursa Major as you are of the contents of this room."

"No." Tonquille shook his head. "I don't see that at all. Since I am demonstrably not in the constellation of Ursa Major, you will need more than your artistic insight to convince me that I am."

"Artistic insight, my Aunt Fanny's left boot! Insight is a better tool than physics any day because



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physics can never-get you anywhere as long as it is concerned with measuring the immeasurable. But this isn't art, it isn't even philosophy—it's pure down-to-earth common sense. Look, my little tubby plutocrat! What's between you and Ursa Major? What precisely stops your being there, since you seem to be sure you're not?"

"Distance, I should say."

"Sure! Sure! Distance—length, my bulky baby boyo. A dimension. An illusion. We've split eternity up into breadth, height and length, haven't we? What about the people, just like ourselves who've done it the other way—breadth, height and stenth?"

"I should follow you better if you told me exactly what stenth is."

"And the others who've made it breadth, length and kelth? God Almighty, man, they're only words. I can invent words for them as good as any they've got themselves; it's the thing that matters, the way of looking, not what you call it. Here, there, anywhere you like, someone, a whole people, a whole world, have looked at infinity differently. Law of averages, they must have. By the law of averages, some will have cottoned on to two of ours with one different. Just their way of looking at something that in its entirety would be completely incomprehensible."

"What you mean is, that all about us there are—"

"Look, mac! Have you ever seen a ghost sideways?"

"I have never seen a ghost at all." Tonquille considered in his quiet, precise way. "But I accept that others have had that good fortune. Sideways, you say? I must admit, from what I know of the subject, it would seem a little unlikely."

"Unlikely my foot! It's totally impossible! All you see of a ghost are its two dimensions, all your eye can manage, because it's not gotten around to taking in the new one. You see its breadth and height and if you've just a tiny little crumb of psychic insight you see the hazy outline of its stenth. There's others, I expect, in the breadth, length and kelth category and those you would only see from above, flat as a pancake. If you ever saw one sideways it would be because you couldn't see it face on. It would be a length, height and telth creation. If you haven't got that little crumb of psychic sense that a little runt like you wouldn't have, you wouldn't see it at all. You'd be stuck with your inborn, handy illusion, depth, length, distance. No, you little tick, you'll never see a ghost."

"I wonder—" Map Tonquille turned back to the sculpture. It was a cone now, the neck stretching away into an infinity of darkness. The woman was there, taking off her bonnet, shaking her hair loose about her shoulders. "What



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you are saying is, in simple terms, that by confusing the eye and the brain, dislodging the focus of the understanding from that area of stimulation-response with which it is accustomed to deal, you disorient the psyche—enabling it to absorb stimuli from another plane. Because it can no longer distinguish its familiar length it takes in, sporadically perhaps, the stenth. Since it forces us to view spatiality from this new plane, your work is four-dimensional."

"FOUR?" Albertin lurched toward his creation, shouldering Tonquille angrily aside. He thrust his long neck forward, glaring at the rapidly shuffling planes. "Four?" he repeated, uncertainly. "Yeah—well—four, I guess—I had hopes—"

"You had hoped for more?"

"Five or six, perhaps." He turned away and leaned his head against the wall. From the movement of his bunched round shoulders he appeared to be stifling a paroxysm of sobbing. "Perhaps the whole damn lot. The nth. Perhaps a particle, a grain of an idea of no dimensions at all. An extra dimension somewhere else down the time-stream. I don't know what I've done. Take the ghastly thing away before I break it with a sledge hammer. Nothing is what you want. Nothing touches on reality. And why doesn't it? Because we can't ever know what reality is. We can't see as much of reality as a dead flea in a bed sock."

"You mentioned ghosts," Tonquille took charge of the dilapidated chair, sitting carefully upright, his small white hands folded carefully in his lap. "You said that I should never see a ghost."

Albertin turned and was leaning back against the wall, staring at him with those scarlet, almost animal eyes.

"Go on!" he said, hoarsely.

"I think you were not speaking of ordinary ghosts in so-called haunted houses. In the interior of *Stoa* I thought I saw—"

"No!" Albertin shouted, heaving himself from the wall with a jerk of his shoulderblades. "No. You never saw anything. There's nothing there."

"Indeed I seemed to see very clearly—"

"No!" Albertin had taken Tonquille by the shoulders, his long chin only a week's stubble length from Tonquille's nose. "You saw nothing. Do you hear? You never saw her!"

"Please pull yourself together, Albertin, or I shall consider this discussion closed."

Albertin straightened his back and turned slowly to the alcove. He limped toward the giant, citadel-like creation, sparkling gold in the dim light of the low-wattage electric bulb suspended by a single cord from the ceiling. He held out a shaking, pathetic hand toward



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the glitter that was fading now into a rising and falling of dull-shaded planes, the cone and the darkness at the end of the cone.

"She's there," he said wistfully. "She's there, isn't she? Down at the end of our days—a long time before we began. Just a figure in a cabin door reflected on the dark, lapping water of an endless night. But there is a light there somewhere behind the door. The door, you see, the door has only breadth and height."

"You said a ghost. Do you—did you know her, Albertin?"

"Time's a poor fish," he said sadly. "Round and round the goldfish bowl. It's nose in the length and the new, the reborn stenth, way back at the tip of its tail."

He was limping as if one leg had suddenly grown too short or the other too long, limping toward the cupboard, one hand raised, shielding his eyes.

"I didn't think you would see her, too," he muttered. "I misjudged you, Mr. Money-bags Tonquille. I'm sorry, Mr. Money-bags Tonquille. I'm truly sorry."

"There is no need to be."

"Take back your money, Mr. Tonquille. This thing's too big for you or me. No one should peep through the two-way mirror like a voyeur in a brothel into the other worlds that are all around us. You know what I've done, Mr. Tonquille? I've made a keyhole. A hole is two-dimensional, you see. Anyone can make a hole in any world, but I've put the stenth behind it. One day, she will see it from her side and in the length, she'll see me. I've made a peephole through to her. I couldn't stand her seeing me again, knowing that I couldn't cross."

Map Tonquille continued to sit rather primly in his chair, fingertips pressed together, considering the implications of a universe without dimensions and a girl in a poke bonnet with two dimensions in one world and a third in another. Albertin behind him was searching the shelves of the cupboard. He had apparently run out of his usual brand of Scotch whiskey since, when he turned, the bottle he held was small enough to be concealed in the palm of his hand.

"Tell me," Tonquille asked him. "Did you know the woman in the poke bonnet?"

"Questions." Albertin groaned. "Always questions. There are no women and no men in heaven or on earth. Only modifications of the universal ether. But the illusion is very sweet." He continued, raising the flask to his lips, "It doesn't matter. Nothing matters. No one can see her sideways."

He had fallen with a crash to the floor and his back was arching and his head thrown back in a sudden, unnatural contortion before Map Tonquille realized what had happened. In a moment he was on his



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knees beside the sculptor, tearing at the smock with the frantic and totally hopeless idea of massaging his heart. Anything to relieve the ghastly spasms that racked the frail, tortured frame.

"Don't die, Albertin," he begged. "Albertin, come back! The world needs you. There is no one anywhere to take your place."

The lips were drawn back over the yellow teeth and the mouth was locked open so far that the jaw seemed ready to split the thin stretched membrane of the cheeks. But the tongue moved and, hoarsely, before the final contortion hooped the agonized body and relaxed it slowly into death, five words croaked from the foam-flecked lips.

"The switch—pull the switch—"

MAP Tonquille looked vainly in the studio, in the one adjacent bedroom and the length of the passage outside for a telephone. He found no switch on that floor of the old, decaying building. He decided it was useless to run for a doctor. The merest layman could see that Albertin was dead, the sweet smell of pear drops on his lips, one hand clutched at his throat and the other reaching out toward the—the thing in the corner. And Tonquille could see the switch now, although he had not noticed it before. A red switch on the plinth under the sculpture. His sculpture. He had not noticed before that his sculpture was mounted on a plinth. Why should he throw the switch? What would the switch do? Extinguish the lighting concealed behind the planes in the interior of his work. Probably. One could not be sure.

The cone was there again, turning very slowly in a clockwise direction. The girl was there, too. No longer in black, but in a long, tight-fitting dress reaching to her ankles and cut low at the front. Edwardian, perhaps. She seemed younger—gayer. He felt a strong desire to sit and watch her for no matter how long and irrespective of what she might do. A keyhole, Albertin had said. He, cultured, urbane, a connoisseur of the arts, was peering at a woman through a keyhole. Albertin was right. One could not draw aside the curtains and gape into the secret interstices between the veils. There would be time when he had the object home, properly mounted in his own apartment, to study and consider all its implications. There was no doubt that Albertin's creation was now his property. His check was valid and could be paid to the sculptor's estate, dependents, if he had any.

The cone had widened now, was as broad as it was long. He would have said it had infinite length and infinite breadth if it had not been for the life-size woman in its center. Infinity could hardly be divided into life-sized objects. She was looking out somewhere over the



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edge of the near-infinite space, her hands extended in welcome. She was turning, spinning widdershins, a smile on her face, her hands stretched out, reaching to the ends of an immeasurable distance where two more hands were forming, spinning and joining with hers, the fingers intertwining, the arms growing out of the particles of darkness until Albertin and she, whole and complete, went twirling down to the narrowing neck of the funnel and vanished.

The planes were shuffling themselves and the zigzag dragons teeth of the endless belt were climbing to a summit that was always one step farther on, when, knowing that he must, Tonquille pulled the switch.

A sense of awful inevitability had seized him and when, with a blinding flash, the entire masterpiece disintegrated into a heap of metal, wire and faintly steaming plastic strips, he was not really surprised. Only tired, disillusioned and determined to forget the whole thing. Surprise came later when he rang the doctor for the tenement and reported to him that Albertin was dead.

"You've made a mistake," the voice retorted sharply. "Albertin was cremated three weeks ago. Suicide. He poisoned himself."

"The time lag on the stenth," Tonquille mused, sadly. "I should have known. I never did see the man sideways. ★


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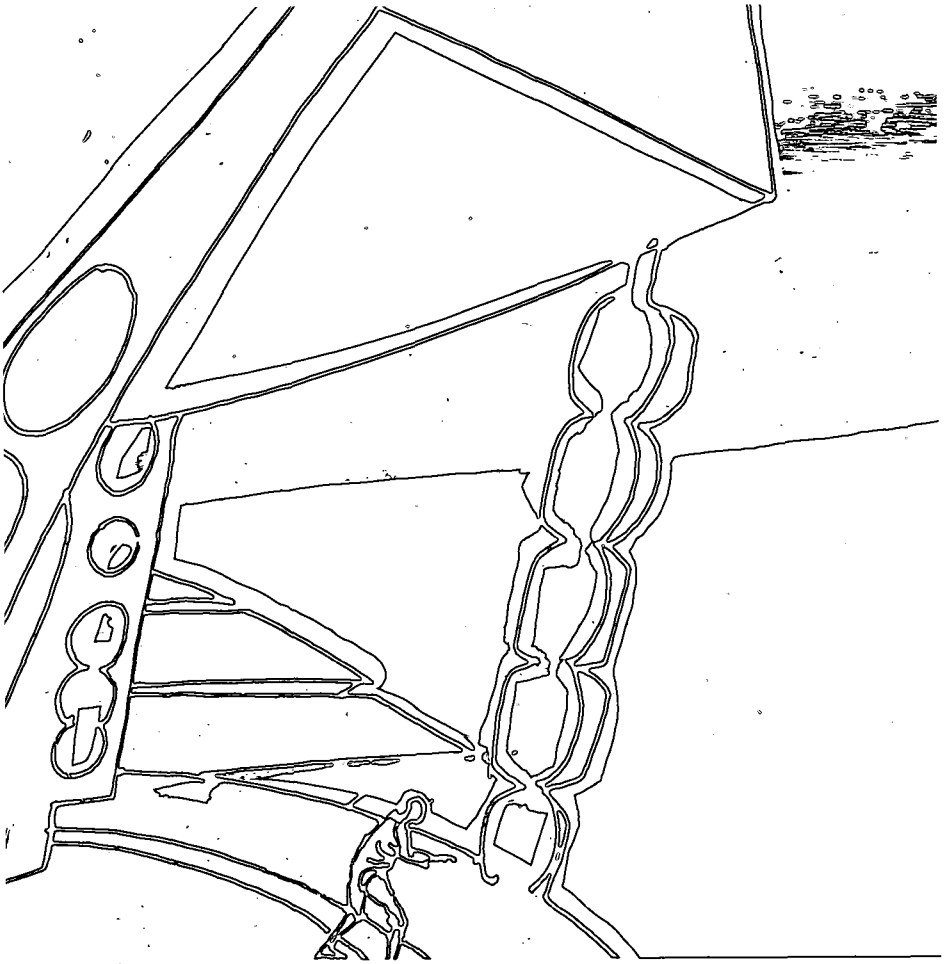

"In the pantheistic systems of Giordano Bruno, monads are conceived of as eternal, both corporeal and soul-like, and each a microcosm or mirror of Deity . . ."

—*Funk & Wagnall's*

I

IN LOUISVILLE Siegmund Kluver still feels like a very small boy. He cannot persuade himself that he has any rightful business up there. A prowling stranger. An illicit intruder. When he goes up to the city of the urbmon's masters a strange boyish shyness settles over him that he must consciously strive to hide. He finds himself forever wanting to peer nervously over his



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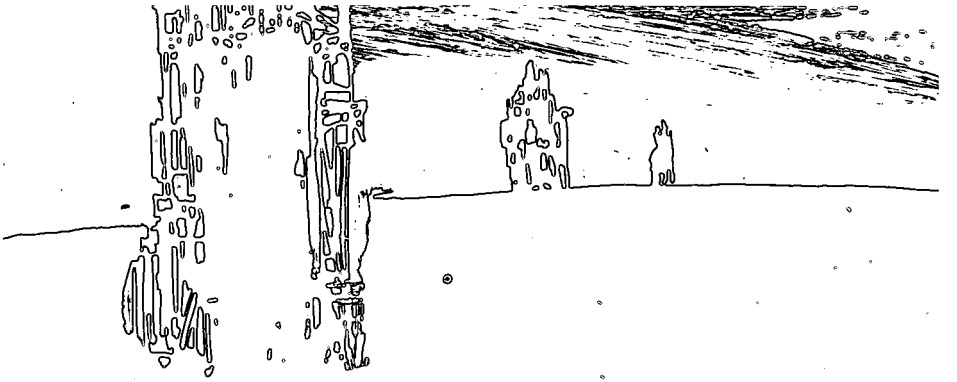

# WE ARE WELL ORGANIZED

ROBERT SILVERBERG

## An Episode—Urban Monad 116

shoulder. Looking for the patrols that he fears will intercept him. The stern brawny figure blocking the wide corridor. What are you doing here, son? You shouldn't be wandering around on these floors. Louisville is for the administrators, don't you know that? And Siegmund will babble excuses, his face blazing. And rush for the dropshaft.

He tries to keep this silly sense of embarrassment a secret. He knows it doesn't fit with the image of himself that everyone else sees. Siegmund the cool customer. Siegmund the man of destiny. Siegmund who was obviously Louisville-bound from childhood.

If they only knew. Underneath it all a vulnerable boy. Underneath it a shy, insecure Siegmund. Worried that he's climbing too fast. Apologizing to himself for his success. Siegmund the humble, Siegmund the uncertain.



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has erected so that he can go on liking himself, and that beneath this subterranean veneer of shyness, somewhere beyond the range of his insight, lies the real Siegmund, every bit as ruthless and cocky and rung-grabbing as the Siegmund the outer world sees.

He goes up to Louisville nearly every morning, now. They requisition him as a consultant. Some of the top men there have made a pet of him—Lewis Holston, Nissim Shawke, Kipling Freehouse, men at the very highest levels of authority. He knows they are exploiting him, dumping on him all the dreary, tedious jobs they don't feel like handling themselves. Taking advantage of his ambitions. *Siegmund, prepare a report on working-class mobility patterns. Siegmund, run a tabulation of adrenal balances in the middle cities. Siegmund, what's the waste-recycling ratio this month?* Siegmund. Siegmund. Siegmund. But he exploits them, too. He is rapidly making himself indispensable, as they slide into the habit of using him to do their thinking. In another year or two, beyond much doubt, they will have to ask him to move up in the building. Perhaps they'll jump him from Shanghai to Toledo or Paris; more likely they'll take him right into Louisville at the next vacancy. Louisville before he's twenty! Has anyone ever done that before?

By that time, maybe, he'll feel comfortable among the members of the ruling class.

they've forgotten that others still have to strive. To them, Siegmund knows, he must seem comical—an earnest, pushy little rung-grabber, his gut afire with the upward urge. They tolerate him because he's capable—more capable, maybe, than most of them. But they don't respect him. They think he's a fool for wanting so badly something that they've had time to grow bored with.

Nissim Shawke, for instance. Possibly one of the two or three most important men of the urbmon. (Who is the *most* important? Not even Siegmund knows. At the top level, power becomes a blurry abstraction; in one sense everybody in Louisville has absolute authority over the entire building and in another sense no one has.) Shawke is about sixty, Siegmund supposes. Looks much younger. A lean, athletic, olive-skinned man, cool-eyed, physically powerful. Alert, wary, a man of great tensile strength. He gives the illusion of being enormously dynamic. A teeming reservoir of potential. Yet so far as Siegmund can see, Shawke does nothing at all. He refers all governmental matters to his subordinates; he glides through his offices at the crest of the urbmon as though the building's problems are mere phantoms.

Why should Shawke strive? He's at the summit. He has everybody fooled, everyone but Siegmund, perhaps. Shawke need not *do* but only *be*. Now he marks time and enjoys the comforts of his position.



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Sitting there like a Renaissance prince. One word from Nissim Shawke could send almost anybody down the chute. A single memorandum from him might be able to reverse some of the urbmon's most deeply cherished policies. Yet he originates no programs, he vetoes no proposals, he ducks all challenges.

To have such power and to refuse to exercise it, strikes Siegmund as making a joke out of the whole idea of power. Shawke's passivity carries implied contempt for Siegmund's values. His sardonic smile mocks all ambition. It denies that there is merit in serving society. I am here, Shawke says with every gesture, and that is sufficient for me; let the urbmon look after itself; anyone who voluntarily assumes its burdens is an idiot. Siegmund, who yearns to govern, finds that Shawke blights his soul with doubt.

*What if Shawke is right? What if I get to his place fifteen years from now and discover that it's all meaningless? But no. Shawke is sick, that's all. His soul is empty. Life* does *have a purpose and service to the community fulfills that purpose. I am well qualified to govern my fellow man; therefore I betray mankind and myself as well, if I refuse to do my duty. Nissim Shawke is wrong. I pity him.*

*But why do I shrivel when I look into his eyes?*

THEN there is Shawke's daughter, Rhea. She lives in Toledo, on the 900th floor, and is married to Kipling Freehouse's son Paolo. There is a great deal of intermarriage among the families of Louisville. The children of the administrators do not generally get to live in Louisville themselves; Louisville is reserved for those who actually govern. Their children, unless they happen to find places of their own in the ranks of the administrators, live mostly in Paris and Toledo, the cities immediately below Louisville. They form a privileged enclave there, the offspring of the great. Siegmund does much of his nightwalking in Paris and Toledo. And Rhea Shawke Freehouse is one of his favorites.

She is ten years older than Siegmund. She has her father's wiry, supple form: a lean, somewhat masculine body, with small breasts and flat buttocks and long solid muscles. Dark complexion; eyes that glitter with private amusement; a sharp elegant nose. She has only three littles. Siegmund does not know why her family is so small. She is quick-witted, knowing, well-informed. She is more nearly bisexual than anyone Siegmund knows; he finds her tigerishly passionate—but she has told him also of the joy she takes in loving other women. Among her conquests has been Siegmund's wife Mamelon, who, he thinks, is in many ways a younger version of Rhea. Perhaps that's why he finds Rhea so attractive; she combines all that he finds most interesting about Mamelon and Nissim Shawke.

Siegmund was sexually precocious. He made his first erotic experiments in his seventh year, two years ahead of the urbmon norm. By the time he was nine he was fa-



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miliar with the mechanics of intercourse, and consistently drew the highest marks in his physical relations class, doing so well that he was allowed to enroll with the eleven-year-olds. Puberty began for him at ten; at twelve he married Mamelon, who was more than a year his senior; shortly he had her pregnant and the Kluvers were on their way out of the Chicago newlywed dorm and off to an apartment of their own in Shanghai. Sex always seemed agreeable to him for its own sake, but lately he has come to realize its value in building character.

He nightwalks assiduously. Young women bore him; he prefers those who are past twenty, like Principessa Mattern and Micaela Quevedo of Shanghai. Or Rhea Freehouse. Women of their experience tend to be better in bed than most adolescents, of course. Not that that is his prime concern. One isn't ever that much better than another and Mamelon can give him all the physical pleasure he needs. But he feels that these older women teach him a great deal about the world, sharing their experience with him in an implicit way. From them he draws subtle insights into the dynamics of adult life, the crises, conflicts, rewards, depths of character. He loves to learn. His own maturity, he is convinced, stems from his extensive encounters with women of the older generation.

Mamelon tells him that he is generally believed to nightwalk even in Louisville. This is in fact not so. He has never dared. There are women up there who tempt him, women in their thirties and forties, even some younger ones, such as Nissim Shawke's second wife, who is hardly older than Rhea. But the self-confidence that makes him seem so awesome to his peers vanishes at the thought of the wives of the administrators. It is bold enough for him to venture out of Shanghai to use women of Toledo or Paris. But Louisville? To slip into bed with Shawke's wife and then have Shawke himself arrive, smiling coldly, saluting, offering him a bowl of tingle—*hello, Siegmund, are you having a good time?* No. Maybe five years from now, when he's living in Louisville himself. Not yet. But he does have Rhea Shawke Freehouse and some others of her stature. Not bad for a start.

IN NISSIM SHAWKE'S lavishly furnished office. There's space to waste in Louisville. Shawke has no desk; he conducts his business from a gravity-web slung hammock-fashion near the broad gleaming window. It is mid-morning. The sun is high. From here one has a stunning view of the neighboring urbmons. Siegmund enters, having received a summons from Shawke five minutes before. Uneasily he meets Shawke's cold gaze. Trying not to look too humble, too obsequious, too defensive, too hostile.

"Closer," Shawke orders. Playing his usual game.

Siegmund crosses the immense room. He must stand virtually nose-to-nose with Shawke. A mockery of intimacy; instead of



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forcing Siegmund to remain at a distance, as one usually requires of subordinates, Shawke brings him so close that it is impossible for Siegmund to keep his eyes locked on both of Shawke's. The image wanders; the strain is painful. Sharp focus is lost and the features of the older man seem distorted.

In a casual, barely audible voice, Shawke says, "Will you take care of this?" and flips a message cube to Siegmund. It is, Shawke explains, a petition from the civic council of Chicago, requesting a liberalization of the urbmon's sex-ratio restrictions. "They want more freedom to pick the sex of their children," Shawke says. "Claiming that the present rules unnecessarily violate individual liberties and are generally unblessworthy. You can play it later for the details. What do you think, Siegmund?"

Siegmund examines his mind for whatever theoretical information it may contain on sex-ratio questions. Not much there. Work intuitively. What kind of advice does Shawke want? He usually wants to be told to leave things just as they are. All right. How, now, to justify the sex-ratio rules without seeming intellectually lazy? Siegmund improvises swiftly. His gift is an easy penetration into the logic of administration.

He says, "My impulse is to tell you to refuse the request."

"Good. Why?"

"The basic dynamic thrust of an urban monad has to be toward stability and predictability and away from randomness. The urbmon can't expand physically and our facilities for offloading surplus population aren't all that flexible. So we need to program orderly growth above all else."

Shawke squints at him chillingly and says, "If you don't mind the obscenity, let me tell you that you sound exactly like a propagandist for limiting births."

"No!" Siegmund blurts. "God bless, no! Of *course* there's got to be universal fertility." Shawke is silently laughing at him again. Goading, baiting. A streak of sadism his main diversion in life. "What I was getting at," Siegmund continues doggedly, "is that within the framework of a society that encourages unlimited reproduction we've got to impose certain checks and balances to prevent disruptive destabilizing processes. If we allow people to pick the sex of their children themselves we could very possibly get a generation that's sixty-five percent male and thirty-five female. Or vice versa, depending on whims and fads of the moment. If that happened, how would we deal with the uncoupled surplus? Where would the extras go? Say, fifteen thousand males of the same age, all with no available mates. Not only would we have extraordinarily unblessworthy social tensions—imagine an epidemic of rape—but those bachelors would be lost to the genetic pool. An unhealthy competitive aspect would establish itself. And such ancient customs as prostitution might have to be revived to meet the sexual needs of the unmated. The obvious consequences of an unbalanced sex



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ratio among a newborn generation are so serious that—"

"Obviously," Shawke drawls, not hiding his boredom.

But Siegmund, wound up in an exposition of theory, cannot easily stop. "Freedom to choose your child's sex would therefore be worse than having no sex-determination processes at all. In medieval times the ratios were governed by random biological events, and naturally tended to gravitate toward a fifty-fifty split, not taking into account such special factors as war or emigration, which, of course, would not concern us. But since we *are* able to control our society's sex ratio, we must be careful not to allow the citizens to bring about an arbitrarily gross imbalance. We cannot afford the risk that in a given year an entire city may opt for female children, let's say—and stranger phenomena of mass fancy than that have been known. On compassionate grounds we may allow a particular couple to request and receive permission for, say, a daughter as their next little, but such requests must be compensated for elsewhere in the city in order to insure the desired overall fifty-fifty division, even if this causes some distress or inconvenience to certain citizens. Therefore I would recommend a continuation of our present policy of loose control over sex ratios, maintaining the established parameters for free choice but always working within an understood assumption that the good of the urbmon as a whole must be—"

"God bless, Siegmund, that's enough."

"Sir?"

"You've made your point. Over and over. I wasn't asking for a dissertation, just an opinion."

Siegmund feels mashed. He steps back, unable to face Shawke's stony, contemptuous eyes at such close range. "Yes, sir," he murmurs. "What shall I do about this cube, then?"

"Prepare a reply to go out in my name. Covering basically what you've told me, only embellishing it a little, dragging in some scholarly authority. Talk to a sociocomputator and get him to give you a dozen impressive-sounding reasons why free choice of sex would probably lead to an imbalance. Get hold of some historian and ask for figures on what actually happened to society the last time sex-ratio freedom was allowed. Wrap it all up with an appeal to their loyalty to the larger community. Clear?"

"Yes, sir."

"And tell them, without quite putting it in those words, that the request is refused."

"I'll say we're referring it to the high council for further study."

"Exactly," Shawke says. "How much time will you need for all this?"

"I could have it done by tomorrow afternoon."

"Take three days. Don't hurry it." Shawke makes a gesture of dismissal. As Siegmund leaves, Shawke winks cruelly and says, "Rhea sends her love."

"I DON'T understand why he has to treat me that way," Siegmund says, fighting to keep



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the whine out of his voice. "Is he like that with everyone?"

He lies beside Rhea Freehouse. They have not yet made love tonight. Above them a pattern of lights twines and shifts. Rhea's new sculpture, purchased during the day from one of the San Francisco artists.

She says, "Father has a very high regard for you."

"He shows it in a strange way. Toying with me, almost sneering at me. He finds me very funny."

"You're imagining it, Siegmund."

"No. Not really. Well, I suppose I can't blame him. I must seem ridiculous to him. Taking the problems of urbmon life so seriously. Spouting long theoretical lectures. Those things don't matter to him any more, and I can't expect a man to remain as committed to his career at the age of sixty as he was at thirty, but he makes me feel like such an idiot for being committed myself. As if there's something inherently stupid about anyone who's involved with administrative challenges."

"I never realized you thought so little of him," Rhea says.

"Only because he falls so far short of realizing his abilities. He could be such a great leader. And instead he sits up there and laughs at everything."

Rhea turns toward him. Her expression is grave. "You're misjudging him, Siegmund. He's as committed to the community welfare as you are. You're so put off by his manner that you don't see what a dedicated administrator he is."

"Can you give me one example of—"

"Very often," she continues, "we project onto other people our own secret, repressed attitudes. If *we* think, down deep, that something is trivial or worthless, we indignantly accuse other people of thinking so. If we wonder privately if we're as conscientious and devoted to duty as we say we are, we complain that others are slackers. It might just happen that your passionate involvement with administrative affairs, Siegmund, represents more of a desire for mere rung-grabbing than it does a strong humanitarian concern, and you feel so guilty about your intense ambitions that you believe others are thinking about you in the same terms that you yourself—"

"Wait! I absolutely deny—"

"Stop it, Siegmund. I'm not trying to pull you down. I'm just offering some possible explanations of your troubles in Louisville. If you'd rather I kept quiet—"

"Go on."

"I'll say what's on my mind . . . and you can hate me afterward, if you like. You're terribly young, Siegmund, to be where you are. Everybody knows you have tremendous ability, that you deserve to be on the brink of going to Louisville—but you're uneasy yourself over how fast you've risen. You try to hide it but you can't hide it from me. You're afraid that people resent your climb—even some people who are still above you may resent you, you sometimes think. So you're self-conscious. You're extra-sensitive You read all sorts of terrible



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things into people's innocent expressions. If I were you, Siegmund, I'd relax and try to enjoy myself more. Don't worry about what people think, or seem to think, about you. Don't fret about grabbing rungs—you're headed for the top, you can't miss, you can afford to slack off and not always worry about the theory of urban administration. Try to be cooler. Less businesslike, less obviously dedicated to your career. Cultivate friendships among people your own age—value people for their own sake, not for where they can help you get. Soak up human nature, work at being more human yourself. Go around the building; do some nightwalking in Warsaw or Prague, maybe. It's irregular but not illegal—and it'll knock some of the tightness out of you. See how simpler people live. Does any of this make sense to you?"

Siegmund is silent.

"Some," he says finally. "More than some."

"Good."

"It's sinking in. Nobody's ever spoken to me like that before."

"Are you angry with me?"

"No. Of course not."

Rhea runs her fingertips lightly along the line of his jaw. "Do you mind topping me now, then? I'd rather not have to be a moral engineer when I have company on my platform."

His mind is full of her words. He is humiliated but not offended, for much of what she has said rings true. Lost in self-analysis, he turns mechanically to her, caressing her. But he is preoccupied with the intricacies of her entry into his character. She finally makes him aware of the failure of his virility.

"Not interested tonight?" she asks.

"Tired," he lies.

Rhea laughs. He thinks about how he must reshape his public image. Not to look ridiculous before the men of Louisville.

HOME again, not long after midnight. Two heads on his sleeping platform. Mamelon is entertaining a nightwalker. Nothing unusual about that; Siegmund knows that his wife is one of the most desired women in the urbmon. For good reason. Standing by the door, he idly watches. Mamelon is making sounds of passion, but to Siegmund they sound false and forced. He feels vague resentment. If you're going to have my wife, man, at least give her a decent time. He strips and cleanses himself, and when he steps out from under the ultrasonic field the pair on the platform lie still. Mamelon is hardly breathing hard, confirming Siegmund's suspicion that she was pretending. Politely Siegmund coughs. Mamelon's visitor looks up, blinking, red-faced, alarmed. He's Jason Quevedo, the innocuous little historian, Micaela's man. Mamelon is rather fond of him, though Siegmund can't see why. Nor does Siegmund understand how Quevedo manages to cope with that tempestuous woman Micaela.

*Mine not to reason why . . .*

The sight of Quevedo reminds him that he must visit Micaela again soon. Also that he has work for Jason.



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"Hello, Siegmund," Jason says, not meeting his eyes. Getting off the platform, looking for his scattered clothes. Mamelon winks at her husband. Siegmund blows her a kiss.

He says, "Before you go, Jason. I was going to call you tomorrow, but this'll do. A project. Historical research."

Quevedo looks eager to get out of the Kluver apartment.

Siegmund continues, "Nissim Shawke is preparing a response to a petition from Chicago concerning possible abandonment of sex-ratio regulations. He wants me to get together some background on how it was in the early days of ratio determination, when people were picking their children's sexes without regard to what anyone else was doing. Since your specialty is the twentieth century, I wondered if you could—"

"Yes, certainly. Tomorrow, first thing. Call me." Quevedo edges doorward. Eager to flee.

Siegmund says, "What I need is some fairly detailed documentation covering first the medieval period of random births, what the sex distribution was, you see, and then going into the early period of control. While you're getting that I'll talk to Mattern, I guess, get some sociocomputation on the political implications of—"

"It's so late, Siegmund," Mamelon complains. "Jason said you can talk to him about it in the morning."

Quevedo nods. Afraid to walk out while Siegmund is speaking, yet obviously unwilling to stay. Siegmund realizes he is being too diligent again. Change the image, change the image; business can wait.

"All right," he says. "God bless, Jason, I'll call you tomorrow."

Grateful, Quevedo escapes and Siegmund lies down beside his wife.

She says, "Couldn't you see he wanted to run? He's so hideously shy."

"Poor Jason," Siegmund says. Stroking Mamelon's sleek flank.

"Where did you go tonight?"

"Rhea."

"Interesting?"

"Very. In unexpected ways. She was telling me that I'm too earnest, that I have to try to be more relaxed."

"She's wise," Mamelon says. "Do you agree with her?"

"I suppose so." He dims the lights. "Meet frivolity with frivolity, that's the secret. Take my work casually. I'll try. I'll try. But I can't help getting involved in what I do. This petition from Chicago, for example. Of *course* we can't allow free choice of children's sexes! The consequences would be—"

"Siegmund." She takes his hand. "I'd rather not hear all that now. I need you. Rhea didn't use you all up, did she? Because Jason certainly wasn't much good tonight."

"The vigor of youth remains. I hope." Yes. He can manage it. He kisses Mamelon. "I love you," he whispers. My wife. My only true. I must remember to talk to Mattern in the morning. And Quevedo. Get the report on Shawke's desk by the afternoon, anyway. If only



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Shawke *had* a desk. Statistics, quotations, footnotes. Siegmund visualizes every detail of it.

II

SIEGMUND ascends to the 975th floor. Most of the key administrators have their offices here —Shawke, Freehouse, Holston, Donnelly, Stevis. Siegmund carries the Chicago cube and his draft of Shawke's reply, loaded with quotes and data supplied by Charles Mattern and Jason Quevedo. He pauses in the hallway. So peaceful here, so opulent; no littles barging past you, no crowds of working folk. *Some day mine.* He sees a vision of a sumptuous suite on one of Louisville's residential levels, three or even four rooms, Mamelon reigning like a queen over it all; Kipling Freehouse and Monroe Stevis dropping by with their wives for dinner; an occasional awed visitor coming up from Chicago or Shanghai, an old friend; power and comfort, responsibility and luxury. Yes.

"Siegmund?" A voice from an overhead speaker. "In here. We're in Kipling's place." Shawke's voice. They have picked him up on the scanners. Instantly he rearranges his face, knowing that it must have worn a vacuous, dreaming look. All business now. Angry with himself for forgetting that they might have been watching. He turns left and presents himself outside the office of Kipling Freehouse. The door slides back.

A grand curving room lined with windows. The glittering face of Urbmon 117 revealed outside, tapering stunningly to its landing-stage summit. Siegmund is startled by the number of top-rank people gathered here. Their potent faces dazzle him. Kipling Freehouse, the head of the data-projection secretariat, a big plump-cheeked man with shaggy eyebrows. Nissim Shawke. The suave, frosty Lewis Holston, dressed as always in incandescently elegant costume. Wry little Monroe Stevis. Donnelly. Kinsella. Vaughan. A sea of greatness. Everyone who counts is here, except only a few; a flippo with a psych-bomb, loose in this room, could cripple the urbmon's government. What terrible crisis has brought them together like this. Frozen in awe, Siegmund can barely manage to step forward. A cherub among the archangels. Stumbling into the making of history. Perhaps they want him here, as if unwilling to take whatever step it is that they're considering without a representative of the coming generation of leaders to give his approval. Siegmund is dizzyingly flattered by his own interpretation. I will be part of it. Whatever it is. His self-importance expands and the glare of their aura diminishes, and he moves in something close to a swagger as he approaches them. Then he realizes that there are some others present who might not be thought to belong at any high-powered policy session. Rhea Freehouse? Paolo, her indolent husband? And these girls, no more than fifteen or sixteen, in gossamer-webs or even less: mistresses of the great ones, handmaidens. Everyone knows that Louisville administrators keep extra girls.



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But here? Now? Giggling on the brink of history? Nissim Shawke salutes Siegmund without rising and says, "Join the party. You name the groover, we've probably got some. Tingle, mindblot, millispans, multiplexers, anything."

Party? Party?

"I've got the sex-ratio report here. Historical data—the sociocomputator—"

"Crot that, Siegmund. Don't spoil the fun."

Fun?

Rhea comes toward him. Lurching, blurred, obviously grooving. Yet her keen intelligence showing through the haze of druggedness. "You forgot what I told you. Loosen up, Siegmund." Whispering. Kisses the tip of his nose. Takes his report from him, puts it on Freehouse's desk. Draws her hands across his cheeks; fingers wet. *Wouldn't be surprised if she's leaving stains on me.* Wine. Blood. Anything. Rhea says, "Happy Somatic Fulfillment Day. We're celebrating. You can have me, if you like, or one of the girls, or Paolo, or anybody else you want." She giggles. "My father, too. Have you ever dreamed of topping Nissim Shawke? Just don't be a spoiler."

"I came up here because I had to give an important document to your father and—"

"Oh, shove it up the access nexus," Rhea says and turns away from him, her disgust unhidden.

Somatic Fulfillment Day. He had forgotten. The festival will start in a few hours; he should be with Mamelon. But he is here. Shall he leave? They are looking at him. A place to hide. Sink into the undulating psychosensitive carpet. Don't spoil the fun. His mind is still full of the business of the morning. *Whereas the random, or purely biological, determination of the sex of unborn infants normally results by expectable statistical distribution in a relatively symmetrical division of. Removal of the element of chance introduces the danger that. It was the experience of the former city of Tokyo, between 1987 and 1996, that the incidence of birth of female offspring declined by a factor of almost. Risks are not counterbalanced by. Therefore it is recommended that.* The party, he sees, looking more closely, is essentially an orgy. He has been to orgies before, but not with people of this level. Fumes rising. The nakedness of Monroe Stevis. A huddled heap of fleshy girls.

"Come on," Kipling Freehouse bellows, "enjoy yourself, Siegmund! Pick a girl, any girl!"

Laughter. A wanton child pushes a capsule into his hand. He is trembling and it drops. Seized and gobbled by one of the other girls. People are still coming in. Dignified, elegant Lewis Holston has a girl on each knee. And one kneeling before him.

"Nothing, Siegmund?" Nissim Shawke asks. "You won't have a *thing*? Poor Siegmund. If you're going to live in Louisville, you've got to know how to play as well as to work."

Judging him. Testing his compatibility: will he fit in with the elite, or must he be relegated to the ranks of the drudges, the mid-



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dle-level bureaucracy? Siegmund sees himself demoted to Rome. His ambitions take over. If knowing how to play is the criterion for admission, he'll play. Grins.

"I'd like some tingle," he says. Stick to what you know you can handle.

"Tingle, coming up."

HE MAKES the effort. A golden-haired nymph offers him the tingle bowl; he gulps, pinches her, gulps again. The sparkling fluid popping in his throat. A third gulp. Swill it down; you aren't paying! They cheer him. Rhea nods approval. Clothes are coming off around the room. The amusements of the masters. There must be fifty people in here now. A clap on the back. Kipling Freehouse. Shouting, deafeningly hearty: "You're all right, boy! Worried about you, you know! So serious, so dedicated! Not bad virtues to have, eh, but there's got to be more, you follow? A playful spirit. Eh? Eh?"

"Yes, sir. I know what you mean, sir."

Siegmund dives into the heap. Musky womansmells. A fountain of sensation. Someone pops something into his mouth. He swallows, and moments later feels the back of his skull lift. Laughter. He is being kissed. Forced down against the carpet by his assailant. Rhea? Yes. Music blaring from above. In the tangle he discovers himself sharing a girl with Nissim Shawke. A cold wink from him; an icy grin. Shawke testing his capacity for pleasure. Everyone watching him, seeing if he's decadent enough to deserve promotion to their midst. Let yourself go! Let everything go!

Urgently he compels himself to revel. Much depends on this. Below him 974 wondrous floors of urbmon and if he wants to stay up here he must know how to play. Disillusioned that the administrators are like this. So common, so vulgar, the cheap hedonism of a ruling class. They could be Florentine dukes, Parisian grandees, Borgias, drunken boyars. Unable to accept this image of them, Siegmund constructs a fantasy: they have staged this revel solely to test his character, to determine whether he is indeed merely a dreary drudge or if he has the breadth of spirit a Louisville man needs. Folly to think they spend their priceless time swilling and topping like this; but they are flexible, they can enjoy life, they turn from work to play with equal gusto. And if he wants to live among them he must demonstrate equal many-sidedness. He will. He will.

His furry brain swirls with conflicting chemical messages.

"Let's sing!" he yells desperately. "Everybody sing!" Bellowing:

*If you come to me by the dark of night*
*With your blessman all aglow*
*And you slip down beside me*
*And try to get inside me—*

They sing with him. He cannot hear his own voice. Dark eyes pear into his. "God bless," a long rippling lass murmurs. "You're cute. The famous Siegmund Kluver." She belches tingle bubbles.

"We've met before, haven't we?"



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"Once, I think, in Nissim's office. Scylla Shawke."

The great man's wife. Startling in her beauty. Young. Young. No more than twenty-five. He has heard a rumor that the first Mrs. Shawke, Rhea's mother, went down the chute, flippo. Some day he must check on the truth of that. Scylla Shawke wriggles close to him. Her soft black hair dangling in his face. He is almost paralyzed with fear. The consequences; can this be going too far? Recklessly he grabs her and plunges his hand into her tunic. She cooperates. Full warm breasts. Soft moist lips. Can he fail this test by an excess of shamelessness? Never mind. Never mind. Happy Somatic Fulfillment Day! Her body grinds against his, and he realizes, in shock, that it would be no problem to top her right now, here, in this heaving mass of high-level humanity on the floor of Kipling Freehouse's sprawling office. Too far, too fast. He slides free of her grasp. Catching the single flicker of disappointment and reproach in her eyes at his withdrawal. Rolls over; Rhea. "Why didn't you?" she whispers. And Siegmund says, "I couldn't," just before another girl, straddling him, kneels and pours something sweet and sticky into his mouth. He whirls within his skull. "It was a mistake," Rhea tells him. "She was being set up for you." Her words fracture and the pieces rebound, soaring high and drifting about the room. Something strange has happened to the lights; everything has become prismatic, and from all plane surfaces an eerie radiance is streaming. Siegmund crawls through the tumult, searching for Scylla Shawke. Instead he finds Nissim.

"I'd like to discuss the business of the Chicago sex-ratio petition with you now," the administrator tells him.

WHEN Siegmund returns to his apartment hours later, he finds Mamelon pacing grimly about. "Where have you been?" she demands. "Somatic Fulfillment Day's almost over. I've called the access nexus, I've had tracers all over the building, I've—"

"I was in Louisville," Siegmund says. "Kipling Freehouse had a party." Stumbles past her. Drops face down on the sleeping platform. First come the dry sobs, then the tears, and by the time they stop flowing Somatic Fulfillment Day might just as well be over.

THIS is the bottom. Siegmund Kluver prowls uneasily among the generators. The weight of the building presses crushingly on him. The whining song of the turbines troubles him. He feels disoriented, a wanderer in the depths. How huge this room is: an immense box far below the ground, so big that the globes of light in its ceiling are barely able to illuminate the distant concrete floor. Siegmund creeps along a catwalk midway between floor and ceiling. Palatial Louisville three kilometers above his head. Carpets and draperies, inlays of rare woods, the trappings of power, very far away now. He hadn't meant to come here, not this far down. Warsaw was his intended destination tonight. But



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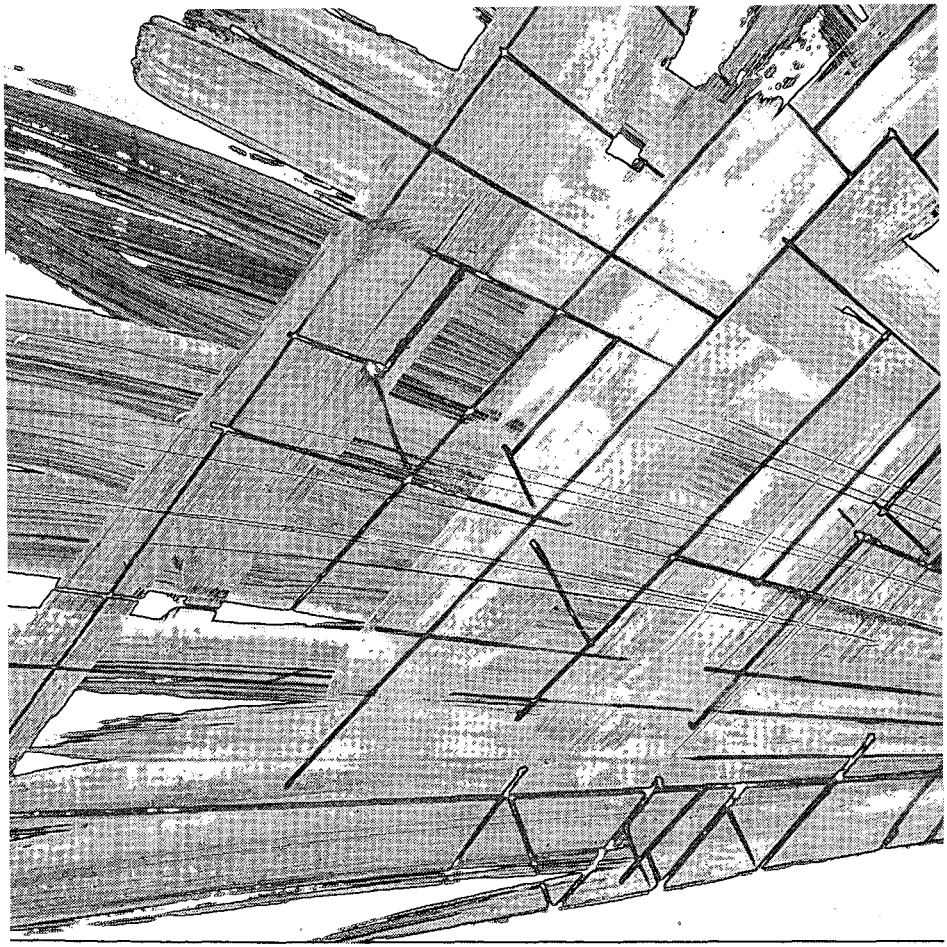

somehow first here. Stalling for time. Siegmund is frightened. Searching for an excuse not to do it. If they only knew. The cowardice within. UnSiegmundlike.

He rubs his hands along the catwalk railing. Cold metal, shaky fingers. A constant throbbing boom running through the building here. He is not far from the terminus of the chutes that convey solid wastes to the power plant: discards of all kinds, old clothes, used data cubes, wrappers and packages, the bodies of the dead, occasionally the bodies of the living, coursing down the spiraling slideways and tumbling into the compactors. And moving thence on gliding belts into the combustion chambers. The liberation of heat for electrical generation: waste not, want not. The electrical load is heavy at this hour. Every apartment is lit. Siegmund closes his eyes and receives a vision of



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Urban Monad 116's 886,000 people linked by an enormous tangle of wiring. A giant human switchboard.

*And I am no longer plugged into it. Why am I no longer plugged into it? What has happened to me? What is happening to me? What is about to happen to me?*

Sluggishly he moves along the catwalk and passes out of the generating room. Entering a sleek-walled tunnel; behind its glossy paneled sides, he knows, run the transmission lines along which power flows toward the debooster circuitry. And here the reprocessing plant—urine pipes, fecal reconversion chambers. All the wondrous stuff by which the urbmon lives. No other human being in sight. The heavy weight of the solitude. Siegmund shivers. He must go up to Warsaw soon. Yet he continues to drift like a touring schoolchild through the utility cen-



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*you, Siegmund. I'd relax and try to enjoy myself more. Don't worry about what people think, or seem to think, about you. Soak up human nature, work at being more human yourself. Go around the building; do some nightwalking in Warsaw or Prague, maybe. See how simpler people live.* Shrewd words. Wise woman. Why be afraid? Go up. Go up. It's getting late.

Standing outside a NO ADMITTANCE hatch leading to one Shawke and Kipling Freehouse that nearly everything being done by human labor in the industrial levels could be handled by machines; instead of employing thousands of people in Warsaw, Prague, and Birmingham, they could set up a totally automated output program, with a few supervisors to keep watch over the inventory homeostasis, and a few maintenance men to handle emergencies, such as repairing the repair-machines. Shawke gave him a patron-



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izing smile. "But if they had no work, what would all those poor people do with their lives?" he asked. "Do you think we can turn them into poets, Siegmund? Professors of urban history? We deliberately devise labor for them, don't you see?" Siegmund embarrassed by his naivete. A rare failure, for him, of insight into the methodology of government. He still feels uncomfortable about that conversation. In an ideal commonwealth, he believes, every person should have meaningful work to do. He wishes the urban monad to be an ideal commonwealth. But yet certain practical considerations of human limitations interpose themselves. But yet. But yet. The makework in Warsaw is a blot on the theory.

Pick a door. Say, 6021. 6023. 6025. Strange to see the apartments bearing four-digit numbers. 6027. 6029. Siegmund puts his hand to the knob. Hesitates. A rush of sudden timidity. Imagining, within, a brawny, hairy, growling, sullen working-class husband, a shapeless, weary working-class wife. And he must intrude on their intimacies. Their resentful glare upon seeing his upper-level clothing. *What is this Shanghai dandy doing here? Doesn't he have any regard for decency?* And so forth. And so forth. Siegmund almost flees. Then he takes hold of himself. They dare not refuse. They dare not be sullen. He opens the door.

The room is dark. Only the nightglow is on; his eyes adjust and he sees a couple on the sleeping platform and five or six littles on cots. He approaches the platform. Stands over the sleepers. His imagined portrait of the room's occupants altogether inaccurate. They could be any young married pair of Shanghai, Chicago, Edinburgh. Strip away the clothes, let sleep eradicate the facial expressions denoting position in the social matrix, and distinctions of class and city perhaps disappear. The naked sleepers are only a few years older than Siegmund—he maybe nineteen, she possibly eighteen. The man slender, narrow shoulders, unspectacular muscles. The woman trim, standard, agreeable body, soft yellow hair. Siegmund lightly touches her shoulder. A ridge of bone lying close beneath the skin. Blue eyes flickering open. Fear giving way to understanding: oh, a nightwalker. And understanding giving way to confusion: the nightwalker wears upper-building clothes. Etiquette demands an introduction. "Siegmund Kluver," he says. "Shanghai."

The girl's tongue passes hurriedly over her lips. "Shanghai? Really?" The husband awakes. Blinking, puzzled. "Shanghai?" he says. "What for, down here, huh?" Not hostile, just wondering. Siegmund shrugs, as if to say a whim, a fancy. The husband gets off the platform. Siegmund assures him that it isn't necessary for him to leave, that it'll be quite all right to have him here, but that kind of thing evidently isn't practiced in Warsaw: the arrival of the nightwalker is the signal for the husband to clear out. Loose cotton wrap already over his pale, almost hair-



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less body. A nervous smile! see you later, love. And out. Siegmund alone with the woman. "I never met anybody from Shanghai before," she says.

"You haven't told me your name."

"Ellen."

He lies down beside her. Stroking her smooth skin. Rhea's words echo. *Soak up human nature. See how simpler people live.* He is so tightly drawn. His flesh mysteriously invaded by a spreading network of fine golden wires. Penetrating the lobes of his brain. "What does your husband do, Ellen?"

"He's on fork-lift now. Used to be a cabler, but he got hurt sheathing. The whiplash."

"He works hard, doesn't he?"

"The sector boss says he's one of the best. I think he's okay too." A sniggering little giggle. "What floors are Shanghai, anyway? That's someplace around 700, isn't it?"

"761 to 800." Caressing her. Her body quivers—fear or desire? Shyly her hand goes to his clothing. Maybe just eager to get him in and out and gone. The frightening stranger from the upper levels. Or else not accustomed to foreplay. A different milieu. He'd rather talk a while first. *See how simpler people live.* He's here to learn, not merely to top. Looking around the room: the furnishings drab and crude, no grace, no style. Yet designed by the same craftsmen who furnish Louisville and Toledo. Obviously aiming for a lower taste. A prevailing film of grayness over everything. Even the girl. *I could be with Micaela Quevedo now. I could be with Principessa. Or with. Or perhaps with. But I am here.* He searches for probing questions to ask. To bring out the essential humanity of this obscure person over whom he one day will help to rule. *Do you read much? What are your favorite screen shows? What sort of foods do you like? Are you doing what you can to help your littles rise in the building? What do you think of the people down in Reykjavik? And those in Prague?* But he says nothing. What's the use? What can he learn? Impassable barriers between person and person. Touching her here and here and here. Her fingers on him.

"You don't like me," she says sadly.

He wonders how often she uses the cleanser. "Maybe I'm a little tired," he says. "So busy these days." Pressing his body against hers. The warmth of her possibly will resurrect him. Her eyes staring into his. Blue lenses over inner emptiness. He kisses the hollow of her throat. "Hey, that tickles!" she says, wriggling. He trails his fingers down her belly. She is ready. But he isn't. Can't. "Is there anything special?" she asks. "If it isn't too complicated maybe I could." He shakes his head. He isn't interested in whips and chains and thongs. Just the usual. But he can't. His fatigue only a pretense; what cripples him is his sense of isolation. Alone among 886,000 people. *And I can't reach her.* The Shanghai swell, incapable, unmanned. Now she is no longer afraid of him and not very sym-



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pathetic. She takes his failure as a sign of his contempt for her. He wants to tell her how many hundreds of women he has topped in Shanghai and Chicago, and even Toledo. Where he is regarded as devilishly virile. She squirms indignantly. He releases her. Rises, adjusts himself. Face blazing. As he goes to the door he looks back. She is sitting up wantonly, looking mockery at him. Makes a gesture with three fingers, no doubt a scabrous obscenity here. He says, "I just want you to know. The name I gave you when I came in—it isn't mine. That's not me at all." And goes hastily out. So much for soaking up human nature. So much for Warsaw.

HE TAKES the liftshaft randomly to 118, Prague, gets out, walks halfway around the building without entering any apartment or speaking to anyone he meets; gets into a different liftshaft; goes up to 173 in Pittsburgh; stands for a while in a corridor, listening to the pounding of the blood in the capillaries of his temples. Then he steps into a somatic fulfillment hall. Even at this late hour there are people making use of its facilities: a dozen or so in the whirlpool tumbler, five or six prancing on the treadmill, a few couples. His Shanghai clothes earn him some curious stares but no one approaches him. Shoulders slumping, he goes slowly out of the somatic fulfillment hall. Now he takes to the stairs, plodding up the great coil that runs the whole thousand-floor height of Urban Monad 116. He looks up the mighty helix and sees the levels stretching toward infinity, with banks of lights glittering above him to denote each landing. Birmingham, San Francisco, Colombo, Madrid. He grasps the rail and looks down. Eyes spiraling along the descending path. Prague, Warsaw, Reykjavik. A dizzying vortex; a monstrous well through which the light of a million globes drifts from above like snowflakes. He clambers doggedly up the myriad steps. Hypnotized by his own mechanical movements. Before he realizes it, he has climbed forty floors. Sweat drenches him and the muscles of his calves are bunching and knotting. He yanks open the doorway and lurches out into the main corridor. This is the 213th floor. Birmingham. Two men with the smirking look of nightwalkers on their way home stop him and offer him some kind of groover, a small translucent capsule containing a dark, oily orange fluid. Siegmund accepts the capsule without a word and swallows it unquestioningly. They tap his biceps in a show of good fellowship and go on their way. Almost at once he feels nausea. Then blurred red and blue lights sway before his eyes. He wonders dimly what they have given him. He waits for the ecstasy. He waits. He waits.

THE next thing he knows, the thin light of dawn is in his eyes and he is sitting in an unfamiliar room, sprawled out in a web of oscillating, twanging metal mesh. A tall young man with long golden hair stands over him and Siegmund can hear his own voice saying,



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"Now I know why they go flippo. One day it just gets to be too much for you. The people right up against your skin. You can feel them. And—"

"Easy. Back it up a little. You're overloading."

"My head is about to explode." Siegmund sees an attractive red-haired woman moving around in the far corner of the room. He is having difficulty focusing his eyes. "I'm not sure I know where I am," he says.

"Three hundred seventieth. That's San Francisco. You're really sectioned off, aren't you?"

"My head. As if it needs to be pumped out."

"I'm Dillon Chrimes. My wife, Electra. She found you wandering in the halls." His host's friendly face smiling into his. Strange blue eyes, like plaques of polished stone. "About the building," Chrimes says. "You know, one night not too long ago I took a multiplexer and I *became* the whole crotting building. And really flew on it. You know, seeing it as one big organism, a mosaic of thousands of minds. Beautiful. Until I started to come down—and on the downside it struck me as just an awful hideous beehive of a place. You lose your perspective when you mess your mind with chemicals. But then you regain it."

"I can't regain it."

"What's the good of hating the building? I mean, the urbmon's a real solution to real problems, isn't it?"

"I know."

"And most of the time it works. So it's a sterilizer to waste your time hating it, do you understand?"

"I don't hate it," Siegmund says. "I've always admired the theory of verticality in urban thrust. My specialty is urbmon administration. Was. Is. But suddenly everything's all wrong, and I don't know where the wrongness is. In me or in the whole system? And maybe not so suddenly."

"There's no real alternative to the urbmon," Dillon Chrimes says. "I mean, you can jump down the chute, I guess, or run off to the communes, but those aren't sensible alternatives. So we stay here. And groove on the richness of it all. You must just have been working too hard. Look, you want something cold to drink?"

"Please. Yes," Siegmund says.

The red-haired woman puts a flask in his hand. As she leans toward him, her breasts sway out, tolling like fleshy bells. She is quite beautiful. A tiny spurt of hormones within him. Reminding him of how this night had begun. Nightwalking in Warsaw. A girl. He has forgotten her name. His failure.

Dillon Chrimes says, "The screen's been broadcasting an alarm for Siegmund Kluver of Shanghai. Tracers out for him since 0400. Is that you?

Siegmund nods.

"I know your wife. Mamelon, right?" Chrimes shoots a glance at his own wife. As if there is a jealousy problem here. In a lower tone he says to Siegmund, "Once when I was doing a performance in Shanghai I met her on a nightwalk. Lovely. That cool grace of hers. A statue full of passion. Probably



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very worried about you right now, Siegmund."

"Performance?"

"I play the vibrastar in one of the cosmos groups." Chrimes makes ecstatic keyboard gestures with his fingers. "You've probably seen me. How about letting me put through a call to your wife, all right?"

Siegmund says, "A purely personal thing. A sense of coming apart. Or breaking loose from my roots."

"What?"

"A kind of rootlessness. As though not belonging in Shanghai, not belonging in Louisville, not belonging in Warsaw, not belonging anywhere. Just a cluster of ambitions and inhibitions, no real self. And I'm lost. And I'm lost inside."

"Inside what?"

"Inside myself. Inside the building. A sense of coming apart. Leaving pieces of me all over the place. Films of self peeling away, drifting off." Siegmund realizes that Electra Chrimes is staring at him. Appalled. He struggles for self-control. Sees himself stripped down to the bone. Spinal column exposed, the comb of vertebrae, the oddly angular cranium. Siegmund. Siegmund. Dillon Chrimes' earnest, troubled face. A handsome apartment. Polymirrors, psychedelic tapestries. These happy people. Fulfilled in their art. Plugged into the switchboard. "Lost," Siegmund says.

"Transfer to San Francisco," Chrimes suggests. "We don't push hard here. We can make room. Maybe you'll discover artistic talent. You could write programs for the screen shows, maybe. Or—"

Siegmund laughs harshly. His throat is furry. "I'll write this show about the hungry rung-grabber who gets almost to the top and decides he doesn't want it. I'll—no, I won't. I don't mean any of this. It's the groover talking out of my mouth. Those two slipped me a filther, that's all. You'd better call Mamelon." Getting to his feet. Trembling. A sensation of being at least ninety years old. He starts to fall. Chrimes and his wife catch him. His cheek against Elektra's swaying breasts. Siegmund manages a smile. "It's the groover talking out of my mouth," he says again. "These damned drugs. These. Damned. Drugs."

"IT'S a long dull story," he tells Mamelon. "I got into a place where I didn't want to be, and somehow I took a capsule without knowing what I was taking, and everything got confused after that. But I'm all right now. I'm all right."

## III

AFTER a day's medical absence he returns to his desk in Louisville Access Nexus. A pile of memoranda awaits him. Much need of his services by the great men of the administrative class. Nissim Shawke wants him to do a follow-up reply to the petitioners from Chicago on that business of asking for freedom to determine the sex of one's offspring. Kipling Freehouse requests an intuitive interpretation of certain figures in next quarter's production-balance esti-



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mates. Monroe Stevis is after a double flow-chart showing attendance at sonic centers plotted against visits to blessmen and consolers: a psychological profile of the populations of six cities. And so on. Picking his brains. How blessworthy to be useful. How wearying to be used.

He does his best, laboring under his handicap. A sense of coming apart. A dislocation of the soul.

MIDNIGHT. Sleep will not come. He lies beside Mamelon, tossing. His nerves rustle in the darkness. She knows he is awake. Her soothing hand roams him. "Can't you relax?" she asks.

"It gets harder."

"Would you like some tingle? Or even mindblot."

"No. Nothing."

"Go nightwalking then," she suggests. "Burn up some of that energy. You're all wired up, Siegmund."

Held together by golden thread. Coming apart. Coming apart.

Go up to Toledo, maybe? Seek consolation in Rhea's arms. She always is helpful. Or even nightwalk Louisville. Drop in on Nissim Shawke's wife Scylla. The audacity of it. But they were trying to push me onto her at that party, Somatic Fulfillment Day. Seeing whether I had the blessmanship to deserve promotion to Louisville. Siegmund knows he failed a test that day. But maybe it is not too late to undo that. He will go to Scylla. Even if Nissim's there. See, I have the requisite amorality! See, I defy all bounds. Why should a Louisville wife not be accessible to me? We all live under the same code of law, regardless of the inhibitions of custom that we have lately imposed upon ourselves. So he will say if he finds Nissim. And Nissim will applaud his bravado.

"Yes," he tells Mamelon. "I think I'll nightwalk."

But he remains on the sleeping platform. Some minutes go by. A failure of impulse. He does not want to go; he pretends to be asleep, hoping Mamelon will doze. Some minutes more. Cautiously he opens one eye, slit-wide. Yes, she sleeps. How beautiful she is, how noble even while asleep. The fine bones, the pale skin, the jet-black hair. My Mamelon. My treasure. Lately he has felt little desire even for her. Boredom born of fatigue? Fatigue born of boredom?

The door opens and Charles Mattern comes in.

Siegmund watches the socio-computator tiptoe toward the platform and silently undress. Mattern's lips are tightly compressed, his nostrils flaring. Signs of yearning. Mattern hungers for Mamelon; something has been developing between them over the past two months, Siegmund suspects, something more than mere nightwalking. Siegmund hardly cares. Just so she is happy. Mattern's harsh breathing loud in the room. He starts to awaken Mamelon.

"Hello, Charles," Siegmund says.

Mattern, caught by surprise, flinches and laughs nervously. "I was trying not to wake you, Siegmund."

"I've been up. Watching you."



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"You might have said something, then. To save me all this stealthing around."

"I'm sorry. It didn't occur to me."

Mamelon is awake now, too. Sitting up, bare to the waist. The whiteness of her skin illuminated by the faint glow of the nightlight. Smiling chastely at Mattern: the dutiful female citizen, ready to accept her nocturnal visitor.

Siegmund says, "Charles, as long as you're here, I can tell you that I've got an assignment to do that'll involve working with you. For Stevis. He wants to see if people are spending more time than usual with blessmen and consolers, and less in sonic centers. A double flow-chart that—"

"It's late, Siegmund." Curtly. "Why don't you tell me about it in the morning."

"Yes. All right. All right." Flushing, Siegmund rises from the sleeping platform. He does not have to leave, even with a nightwalker here for Mamelon, but he does not want to stay. Like a Warsaw husband, granting a superfluous and unasked privacy to the other two. He hurriedly finds some clothing. Mattern reminds him that he's free to remain. But no. Siegmund leaves, a little wildly. Almost running down the hall. I will go up to Louisville, to Scylla Shawke. However, instead of asking the liftshaft to take him to the level where the Shawkes live, he calls out a Shanghai floor, 799. Charles and Principessa Mattern live there. He does not dare risk attempting Scylla while he is in this jangled state. Failure could be costly. Principessa will do. A tigress, she is. A savage. Her sheer animal vigor may restore his well-being. She is the most passionate woman he knows, short of Mamelon. And a good age, ripe but not overripe. Siegmund halts outside Principessa's door. It strikes him that it is somewhat bourgeois, something of a pre-urbmon thing, for him to be seeking the wife of the man who is now with his own wife. Nightwalking should be more random, less structured, merely a way of extending the range of one's life-experiences. Nevertheless. He nudges the door open. Relieved and dismayed to hear sounds of ecstasy from within. Two people on the platform: he sees Jason Quevedo. Siegmund quickly ducks out. Alone in the corridor. Where to, now? The world is too complicated for him tonight. The obvious next destination is Quevedo's apartment. For Micaela. But no doubt she will have a visitor too. Siegmund's forehead begins to throb. He does not want to roam the urbmon endlessly. He wants only to go to sleep. Nightwalking suddenly seems an abomination to him: forced, unnatural, compulsive. The slavery of absolute freedom. At this moment thousands of men roam the titanic building. Each determined to do the blessworthy thing. Siegmund, scuffing at the floors, strolls along the corridor and halts by a window. Outside, a moonless night. The sky ablaze with stars. The neighboring urbmons seeming farther away than usual. Their windows bright, thousands of them. He wonders if it is possible to see a commune far to



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the north. The crazy farmers. Micaela Quevedo's brother Michael, the one who went flippo, supposedly visited a commune. At least so the story goes. Micaela still brooding about her brother's fate. Down the chute with him as soon as he stuck his head back inside the urbmon. But of course a man like that can't be permitted to resume his former life here. An obvious malcontent, spreading poisons of dissatisfaction and unblessworthiness. A hard thing for Micaela, though. Very close to her brother, she says. Her twin. Thinks he should have had a formal hearing in Louisville. He did, though. She won't believe it, but he did. Siegmund remembers when the papers came through. Nissim Shawke issuing the decree: if this man ever returns to 116, dispose of him at once. Poor Micaela. Something unhealthy going on, maybe, between her and her brother. I might ask Jason. I might.

Where shall I go now?

He realizes that he has been standing by the window for more than an hour. He stumbles toward the stairs and jogs down twelve levels to his own. Mattern and Mamelon lie sleeping side by side. Siegmund drops his clothing and joins them on the platform. Coming apart. Dislocation. Finally he sleeps, too.

THE solace of religion. Siegmund has gone to see a blessman. The chapel is on the 770th floor: a small room off a commercial arcade, decorated with fertility symbols and incrustations of captive light. Entering, he feels like an intruder. Never any religious impulses before. His mother's grandfather was a Christer, but everyone in the family assumed it was because the old man had antiquarian instincts. The ancient religions have few followers, and even the cult of god's blessing, which is officially supported by Louisville, can claim no more than a third of the building's adult population, according to the last figures Siegmund has seen. Though perhaps things are changing lately.

"God bless," the blessman says, "what is your pain?"

He is plump, smooth-skinned, with a round complacent face and cheerily shining eyes. At least forty years old. What does he know of pain?

"I have begun not to belong," Siegmund says. "My future is unraveling. I am coming unplugged. Everything has lost its meaning and my soul is hollow."

"Ah. Angst. Anomie. Dissociation. Identity drain. Familiar complaints, my son. How old are you?"

"Past fifteen."

"Career profile?"

"Shanghai going on Louisville. Perhaps you know of me. Siegmund Kluver."

The blessman's lips go taut. The eyes veil themselves. He toys with sacred emblems on his tunic's collar. He has heard of Siegmund, yes.

He says, "Are you fulfilled in your marriage?"

"I have the most blessworthy wife imaginable."

"Littles?"

"A boy and a girl. We will have



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a second girl next year."

"Friends?"

"Sufficient," Siegmund says. "And yet this feeling of decomposition. Sometimes my skin itchy all over. Films of decay drifting through the building and wrapping themselves about me. A great restlessness. What's happening to me?"

"Sometimes," the blessman says, "those of us who live in the urban monads experience what is called the crisis of spiritual confinement. The boundaries of our world, that is to say our building, seem too narrow. Our inner resources become inadequate. We are grievously disappointed in our relationships with those we have always loved and admired. The result of such a crisis is often violent: hence the flippo phenomenon. Others may actually leave the urbmon and seek a new life in the communes, which, of course, is a form of suicide, since we are incapable of adapting to that harsh environment. Now, those who neither go berserk nor separate themselves physically from the urbmon occasionally undertake an internal migration, drawing into their own souls and, in effect, contracting as a response to the impingement of adjacent individuals on their psychic space. Does this have any meaning for you?" As Siegmund nods doubtfully, the blessman goes smoothly on, saying, "Among the leaders of this building, the executive class, those who have been propelled upward by the blessworthy drive to serve their fellow men, this process is particularly painful, bringing about as it does a collapse of values and a loss of motivation. But it's easily cured."

"Easily?"

"I assure you."

"Cured? How?"

"We will do it at once, and you will go out of here healthy and whole, Siegmund. The way to health is through kinship with god, you see, god being considered in our view the integrative force giving wholeness to the universe. And I will show you god."

"You will show me god," Siegmund repeats, uncomprehending.

"Yes. Yes." The blessman, bustling around, is busy darkening the chapel, switching off lights and cutting in opaquers. From the floor sprouts a cup-shaped webseat into which Siegmund is gently nudged. Lying there, looking up. The chapel's ceiling, he discovers, is a single broad screen. In its glassy green depths an image of the heavens appears. Stars strewn like sand. A billion billion points of light. Music issues from concealed speakers: the plashy plinks of a cosmos group. He makes out the magical sounds of a vibrastar, the dark twangs of a comet-harp, the wild lurches of an orbital diver. Then the whole group going at once. Perhaps Dillon Chrimes is playing. His friend of that dismal night. Overhead the depth of the perceptive field is deepening; Siegmund sees the orange glint of Mars, the pearly blaze of Jupiter. So god is a light-show plus a cosmos group? How shallow. How empty.

The blessman, speaking over the music, says, "What you see is a direct relay from the thousandth floor. This is the sky over our urb-



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mon at our present moment. Look into the black cone of night. Accept the cool light of the stars. Open yourself to the immensity. What you see is god. What you see is god."

"Where?"

"Everywhere. Immanent and all-enduring."

"I don't see."

The music is turned up. Siegmund now is surrounded by a cage of heavy sound. The astronomical scene takes on a greater intensity. The blessman directs Siegmund's attention to this group of stars and to that, urging him to merge with the galaxy. The urbmon is not the universe, he murmurs. Beyond these shining walls lies an awesome vastness that is god. Let him take you into himself and heal you. Yield. Yield. Yield. But Siegmund cannot yield. He wonders if the blessman should have given him some sort of drug, a multiplexer of some kind that would make it easier for him to open himself to the universe. But the blessman scoffs. One can reach god without chemical assistance. Simply stare. Contemplate. Peer into infinity. Search for the divine pattern. Meditate on the forces in balance, the beauties of celestial mechanics. God is within and without us. Yield. Yield. Yield. "I still don't feel it," Siegmund says. "I'm locked up inside my own head." A note of impatience enters the blessman's tone. *What's wrong with you*, he seems to be saying. *Why can't you? It's a perfectly good religious experience.* But it is no use. After a half-hour Siegmund sits up, shaking his head. His eyes hurt from staring at the stars. He cannot make the mystical leap. He authorizes a credit transfer to the blessman's account, thanks him, and goes out of the chapel. Perhaps god was somewhere else today.

THE solace of the consoler. A purely secular therapist, relying heavily on metabolic adjustments. Siegmund is apprehensive about seeing him; he has always regarded those who have to go to a consoler as somehow defective, and it pains him to be joining that group. Yet he must end this inner turmoil. And Mamelon insists. The consoler he visits is surprisingly young, perhaps thirty-three, with a pinched, bleak face and frosty, ungenerous eyes. He knows the nature of Siegmund's complaint almost before it is described to him. "And when you attended this party in Louisville," he asks, "what effect did it have on you to learn that your idols weren't quite the men you thought they were?"

"It emptied me out," Siegmund says. "My ideals, my values, my guiding images. To see them cavorting like that. Never having imagined they did. I think that's where all the trouble started."

"No," says the consoler, "that's merely where the trouble surfaced. It was there before. In you, deep, waiting for something to push it up into view."

"How can I learn to cope with it?"

"You can't. You'll have to be sent into therapy. I'm going to turn you over to the moral engi-



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neers. You can use a reality adjustment."

HE IS afraid of being changed. They will put him into a tank and let him drift there for days or weeks, while they cloud his mind with their mysterious substances and whisper things to him and massage his aching body and alter the imprinting of his brain. And he will come forth healthy and stable and different. Another person. All his Siegmundness lost along with his anguish. He remembers a girl named Aurea Holston, whose number came up in the lottery for the stocking of the new Urbmon 158, and who did not want to go, and who was persuaded by the moral engineers that it would not be so bad to leave her native urbmon. And came forth from her tank docile and placid, a vegetable in place of a neurotic. Not for me, Siegmund thinks.

It will be the end of his career, too. Louisville does not want men who have had crises. They will find some middle-rung post for him in Boston or Seattle, some tepid minor administrative job, and forget about him. A formerly promising young man. Full reports on reality adjustments are placed each week before Monroe Stevis. Stevis will tell Shawke and Freehouse. Have you heard about poor Siegmund? Two weeks in the tank. Some sort of breakdown. Yes, sad. Very sad. We'll drop him, of course.

No.

What can he do? The consoler has already made up the adjustment request and filed it with one of the computer nodes. Sparkling impulses of neural energy are traveling through the information system, bearing his name. Time is being cleared for him on the 780th floor, among the moral engineers. Soon his screen will tell him the hour of his appointment. And if he does not go to them, they will come for him. The machines with soft rubbery pads on their arms, gathering him up, pushing him along.

No.

He tells Rhea of his predicament. Not even Mamelon knows yet, but Rhea. He can trust her. His best interests at heart. "Don't go to the engineers," she advises.

"The order is already in."

"Have it countermanded."

He looks at her as though she has recommended demolition of the Chipitts urbmon constellation.

"Pull it out of the computer," she tells him. "Get one of the interface men to do it for you. Use your influence. Nobody'll find out."

"I couldn't do that."

"You'll go to the moral engineers, then. And you know what that means."

The urbmon is toppling. Clouds of debris swirl in his brain.

Who would arrange such a thing for him?

Micaela Quevedo's brother worked in an interface crew, didn't he? But he's gone now. There must be others within his grasp, though. When he leaves Rhea, Siegmund consults the records in the access nexus. The virus of unblessworthiness already at work in his soul. Then he realizes he doesn't even need to use his influence. Merely



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make it a matter of professional routine. In his office he taps out a data requisition: status of Siegmund Kluver, remanded for therapy on 780th floor. Instantly comes the information that Kluver is due for therapy in seventeen days. The computer does not withhold data from Louisville Access Nexus. The presumption exists that anyone who asks, using the equipment in the nexus, has the right to do so. Very well. The vital next step. Siegmund instructs the computer to yank the therapy assignment for Siegmund Kluver. This time there is a bit of resistance: the computer wants to know who authorizes the yanking. Siegmund meditates on that for a moment. Then inspiration comes. The therapy of Siegmund Kluver, he informs the machine, is being canceled by order of Siegmund Kluver of the Louisvill Access Nexus. Will it work? "No," the machine may say, "you can't cancel your own therapy appointment. Do you think I'm stupid?" But the mighty computer *is* stupid. Thinking with the speed of light but unable to cross the gaps of intuition. Does Siegmund Kluver of Louisville Access Nexus have the right to cancel a therapy appointment? Yes, certainly; he must be acting on behalf of Louisville itself. Therefore let it be canceled. The instructions flicker through the proper node. No matter whose appointment it is, as long as authority to cancel can be attributed properly. It is done. Siegmund taps out a data requisition: status of Siegmund Kluver, remanded for therapy on 780th floor. Instantly comes the information that Kluver's appointment for therapy has been canceled. His career is safe, then. But he is left with his anguish. There is that to consider.

THIS is the bottom. Siegmund Kluver prowls uneasily among the generators. The weight of the building presses crushingly on him. The whining song of the turbines troubles him. He feels disoriented, a wanderer in the depths. How huge this room is.

HE ENTERS apartment 6029, Warsaw. "Ellen?" he says. "Listen, I've come back. I want to apologize for the last time. It was all a tremendous mistake." She shakes her head. She has already forgotten him. But she is willing to accept him, naturally. The universal custom. Instead he kisses her hand. "I love you," he whispers, and flees.

THIS is the office of Jason Quevedo, historian, on the 185th floor, Pittsburgh. Where the archives are. Jason sits before his desk, manipulating data cubes, as Siegmund enters. "It's all here, isn't it?" Siegmund asks. "The story of the collapse of civilization. And how we rebuilt it again. Verticality as the central philosophical thrust of human congruence patterns. Tell me the story, Jason. Tell me." Jason looking at him strangely. "Are you ill, Siegmund?" And Siegmund: "No, not at all. How perfectly healthy I am. Micaela's been explaining your thesis to me. The genetic adaptation of humanity to urbmon life. I'd like more details. How we've



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been bred to be what we are. We happy many." Siegmund picks up two of Jason's cubes and fondles them, almost sexually, leaving fingerprints on their sensitive surfaces. Tactfully Jason takes them from him. "Show me the ancient world," Siegmund says, but as Jason slips a cube into the playback slot, Siegmund goes out.

THIS is the great industrial city of Birmingham. Pale, sweating, Siegmund Kluver watches machines stamping out machines. While slumped and sullen human handlers supervise the work. This thing with arms will help in next autumn's harvest at a commune. This dark glossy tube will fly above the fields, spraying insects with poison. Siegmund finds himself weeping. He will never see the communes. He will never dig his fingers into the rich brown soil. The beautiful meshing ecology of the modern world. The poetic interplay of commune and urbmon for the benefit of all. How lovely. *Then why am I weeping?*

SAN FRANCISCO is where the musicians and artists and writers live. The cultural ghetto. Dillon Chrimes is rehearsing with his cosmos group. The thunderous web of sounds. An intruder. "Siegmund?" Chrimes says, breaking his concentration. "How are you getting along, Siegmund? Good to see you." Siegmund laughs. He gestures at the vibrastar, the comet-harp, the incantator and the other instruments. "Please," he murmurs, "keep on playing. I'm simply looking for god. You don't mind if I listen? Maybe he's here. Play some more."

ON THE 761st floor, Shanghai's bottom level, he finds Micaela Quevedo. She does not look well. Her black hair is dull and stringy, her eyes are bitter, her lips are clamped. Seeing Siegmund in midday startles her. He says quickly, "Can we talk a while? I want to ask you some things about your brother Michael. Why he left the building. What he hoped to find out there. Can you give me any information?" Micaela's expression grows even harder. Coldly she says, "I don't know a thing. Michael went flippo, that's all that matters. He didn't explain himself to me." Siegmund knows that this is untrue. Micaela is concealing vital data. "Don't be unblessworthy," he urges. "I need to know. Not for Louisville. Just for myself." His hand on her thin wrist. "I'm thinking of leaving the building too," Siegmund confides.

HE HALTS at his own apartment on the 787th floor. Mamelon is not there. As usual, she is at the somatic fulfillment hall, enhancing her supple body. Siegmund records a brief message for her. "I loved you," he says. "I loved you. I loved you."

HE MEETS Charles Mattern in a Shanghai hallway. "Come have dinner with us," the sociocomputator says. "Principessa's always happy to see you. And the children. Indra and Sandor always talk about you. Even Marx. When's Siegmund coming again,



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they say? We like Siegmund so much." Siegmund shakes his head. "I'm sorry, Charles. Not tonight. But thanks for asking." Mattern shrugs. "God bless, we'll get together soon, eh?" he says, and strolls away, leaving Siegmund in the midst of the flow of pedestrian traffic.

THIS is Toledo, where the pampered children of the administration caste make their homes. Rhea Shawke Freehouse lives here. Siegmund does not dare pay a call on her. She is too perceptive; she will understand at once that he is in a terminal phase of collapse, and undoubtedly will take preventive action. But yet he must make some move in her direction. Siegmund pauses outside her apartment and tenderly presses his lips to the door. Rhea. Rhea. Rhea. I loved you, too. He goes up.

NOR does he make any visits in Louisville, though it would please him to see some of the masters of the urbmon tonight, Nissim Shawke or Monroe Stevis or Kipling Freehouse. Magical names, names that resonate in his soul. Best to bypass them. He goes directly to the landing stage on the thousandth floor. Stepping out on the flat breeze-swept platform. Night, now. The stars glittering fiercely. Up there is God, immanent and all-enduring, floating serenely amidst the celestial mechanics. Below Siegmund's feet is the totality of Urban Monad 116. What is today's population? 888,904. Or some such. +131 since yesterday and +9,902 since the first of the year, adjusted for the departure of those who went to stock the new Urbmon 158. Maybe he has the figures all wrong. It hardly matters. The building is athrob with life, at any rate. Fruitful and multiplying. God bless! So many servants of god. Shanghai's 34,000 souls. Warsaw. Prague. Tokyo. The ecstasy of verticality. In this single slender tower we compress so many thousands of lives. Plugged into the same switchboard. Homeostasis, and the defeat of entropy. We are well organized here. All thanks to our dedicated administrators.

And look, look there! The neighboring urbmons! The wondrous row of them! Urbmon 117, 118, 119, 120! The fifty-one towers of the Chipitts constellation. Total population now 41,516,883. Or some such. And east of Chipitts lies Boswash. And west of Chipitts is Sansan. And across the sea is Berpar and Wienbud and Shankong and Bocarac. And more. Each cluster of towers with its millions of encapsulated souls. What is the population of our world now? Has it reached 76,000,000,000 yet? They project 100,000,000,000 for the not too distant future. Many new urbmons must be built to house those added billions. Plenty of land left, though. They can put platforms on the sea.

To the north, on the horizon, he imagines he can see the blaze of a commune's bonfires. Like the flesh of a diamond in sunlight. The farmers dancing. Their grotesque rites. Bringing fertility to the fields. God bless! It is all for the best. Siegmund smiles. He



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stretches forth his arms. If he could only embrace the stars, he might find god. He walks to the very edge of the landing stage. A railing and a force-field protect him against the vagrant gusts of wind that might hurl him to his death. It is very windy here. Three kilometers high, after all. A needle sticking into god's eye. If he could only spring into the heavens. Looking down as he floats past, seeing Chipitts below, the rows of towers, the farmland surrounding them, the miraculous urban rhythm of verticality plotted against the miraculous commune rhythm of horizontality. How beautiful the world is tonight. Siegmund throws back his head. Eyes shining. And there is god. The blessman was right. There! There! Wait, I'm coming! Siegmund mounts the railing. Teeters a little. Currents of wind buffeting him. He has risen above the protective force-field. It seems almost as if the whole building was swaying. Think of the body heat that 888,904 human beings under the same roof must generate. Think of the waste products they daily send down the chute. All these linked lives. The switchboard. And God watching over us. I'm coming! I'm coming. Siegmund flexes his knees, gathers his strength, sucks air deep into his lungs. And sails toward God in a splendid leap.

NOW the morning sun is high enough to touch the uppermost fifty stories of Urban Monad 116. Soon the building's entire eastern face will glitter like the bosom of the sea at daybreak. Thousands of windows, activated by the dawn's early photons, deopague. Sleepers stir. Life goes on. God bless! Here begins another happy day. ★


## SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW

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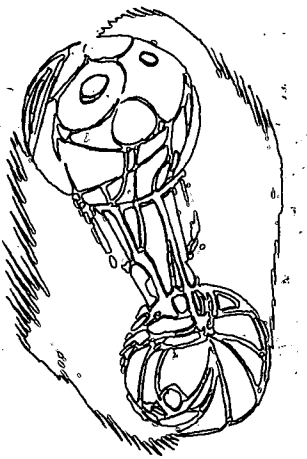
# TWO THOUSAND ONE HOURS SOLO



GRAHAME LEMAN

IFYOUWANTYOURBALLBACK
COMEINTOTHEPARKAFTER
YOUCLEANUPTHEYARD . . .

THE alarm is for a point of light moving too fast among the unwinking stars standing over the moon to compute as a planet. Increase the magnification and it looks something like an occulting binary star (but can't be that either). Increase the magnification again, by two more orders of magnitude, and check comparation of radar range and optical angle subtended: it is a glittering dumbell, two spheres about 100 meters in diameter linked by a cylinder a quarter as thick and twice as long. Log it and flop back in the sack, Jack. It is the deep-space vessel *Olaf Stapledon* (ACC.2 vehicle, SK.7 free module up), where, when, and whither she should be: outward bound ex Earth Orbital Four, for a destination somewhere outside the orbit of Saturn, where she will service a telecommunications relay module, functioning to bring space outside the solar system effectively nearer by unmanned deep-space probe.

In one of the spheres, in the half of it opposite the linking cylinder, Art Carson (from Denver, Colorado) is playing an extremely undemanding card game called Black Lady with Sem Kritsky (from the historic steel town of Sverdlovsk).



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"Preacher" Carson has had the three-month cram course in space technology at MIT, following on four years in creative writing school, three years' premium apprenticeship to a Mad Avenue stills photographer, a typing course, two years in a London literary agency, and 2,001 hours solo in a simulated television studio. "Thinker" Kritsky did the MIT course with Carson, was graduated in philosophy from the University of Leningrad, did four years' General Apologetics with the Jesuits in Rome, has worked as a leader writer on *Pravda* and the *New York Times*, also as a feature script writer for French television and radio, specializing in science policy and allocation of national and world resources.

In the other half of this same sphere (in all of it) is the SK.7 free module automation, known familiarly as Skip—and, in decision and action situations, respectfully as Skipper. SK.7, who is in command of the mission, knows exactly what he has to do and precisely how to do it; but he has no idea why he has to do it. This is understandable enough: ever since the trouble in Brazil in 2002 (when a custom modified IBM Mechanarch clawed its way up, in three weeks flat, from Traffic Controller to Chief Executive and CIC Armed Forces), it has been a capital offense to build free module automata capable of teleological thought and behavior. This is not to say, of course, that SK.7 was a hundred percent determined and preprogramed (if he had been, he would not have been able to produce creative solutions to unforeseen emergencies): he was free to pursue certain limited ends as he chose. But built-in, triplicated censor subroutines (with elaborate fail-safe provisions) prevented him from creating ends of his own: some ends in particular (such as discovering once and for all what it all means, or saving the human race from itself before it was too late) would, if framed in the vaguest way, instantly energize total destruct circuits. This would be rough on Carson and Kritsky: but, after all, it was that rough in Brazil in 2002.

Given certain as yet unstopped lacunae in automata theory and technics, it had not been possible to meet these legally mandatory safety specifications without (most unfortunately) also making it impossible for SK.7 to execute certain creative functions of the *Olaf Stapledon*'s mission. This was not so rough on Carson and Kritsky, since it had given each the opportunity to make something of himself (and perhaps a little history for all of us, into the bargain).

KRITSKY had just stuck him with the Queen of Spades for the fifth round in a row, and Carson had gotten bored by unremit-



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ting defeat. He went off into his office, watered the house ivy growing up the bulkhead over his desk, and began to hunt and peck on his old silent portable typewriter.

*Had the fish of ancient times,* he tapped out, *been capable of reactionary thought and equipped to publish popular magazines, the primeval seas would undoubtedly have been disfigured by countless articles condemning those few fish who had dared try to breathe dry air and try to flop about, unsupported by buoyancy, on dry land. Without such fish we would not be here to salute their enterprise and follow their lead in adventure . . .*

He broke off, as he felt Kritsky's breath on his right ear.

"You've got *two* contrafactual conditionals in the very first sentence", said Kritsky, sadly. "And, even if the argument were any good, I can't think it's at all original."

"Only a scoob looks at fellers' first drafts, Sem. In any case, this essay isn't for *Mind* or any other of the mind-wrenching mags you read all the time: it's for syndication in the business sections of hometown, throwaway, retail-advertising papers, worldwide—and you know as well as I do, an effective figure has got to be a cliché. How can you have a comfortingly, comfortably rehearsed response to a figure you never saw before? Look at historical iconography: what could the simple cross have done to people who didn't already know that Christ had been crucified to prove once and for all that things are fine as they are? You stick to your college lecture circuit and leave me do my own thing the way it has to be done."

"Sticking to the college lecture circuit is just what I am doing. The students, even some of the well-paid professors researching and consulting in the harder subjects, kept wanting to know why UN keeps swanning about in space at vast expense, when fifty percent of the population is unemployed and below the poverty line, and ninety-eight percent don't know the difference between the second derivative and the second coming. One student once told me, while he was tarring me for feathers after a live lecture, just how many self-tutor books in elementary mathematics you could buy for the price of one of these things we're riding in. And students often used to wave your columns at me, when they were getting just verbally rough in live seminars: how am I supposed to convince top intellectuals that today's winners know what they're doing to the losers and the world when your junk about ambitious fish keeps popping into every home? You talk to me about history, as if *I* didn't know enough history to make me sick-hearted: how do you think a Jesuit philosopher,



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with fourteen years' grinding training, felt about his task of sapping the intellectual self-confidence of the Marxian élites when the rank and file of the church militant were publicly telling their flocks to render unto Caesar—all too obviously for fear that Caesar might otherwise decide to take it for himself and replace the cardinals with company directors or commissars? The only way to make normally intelligent people even pretend to believe theodicies that run cross-grained to their own everyday experience is with a whip or a gun. And if you shoot all the normally intelligent people, who is there left who can usefully be used? It's like a pastoral society killing all the sheep except those too diseased to bear wool or to be eaten.

"That's dangerous-sounding talk, Sem—and I wouldn't be surprised if there were dangerous thinking behind it. After all, we were hired to think and talk for the UN, not to think and speak for ourselves. Why make difficulties?"

"Horsefeathers. If we weren't capable of understanding what's going on we wouldn't be able to do what we're paid to do. You can't have learned how to put it across without wondering who's putting what across on you—or without being able to tell baloney from a buzz-saw. Nor could I have learned how to try and infect every intellectual in sight with a crippling case of de Chardin's onward and upward disease without learning to tell science from scientism in a deep sleep. You can tell baloney from the style, I can tell scientism from the content. You know as well as I do—those skills are precisely why we're condemned to live out our lives in luxury on a deep-space shuttle, with occasional holidays in the lunar sporting houses, cut off from all contact with Earth except through telecommunications channels filtered through censor circuits."

AT THAT moment, they were interrupted by the hysterical peeping of the proximity alarm signal. After a moment Skip silenced this, informing them in his neutral voice that: one, there was a sizable solid object fine on the port bow, course at three o'clock; two, that there was no chance of a collision; three, that they could look at it on the screen if they cared to punch for it.

They punched for it. It looked like a big, featureless slab of stone or something (according to the scale supered on the screen, about the size of a railway passenger coach), with razor-sharp angles. It was rotating slowly in space, apparently minding its own business. As they watched, a strange pattern of sound (not exactly music but something like the synthetic sound tracks once popular for



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horror movies in the old days) swelled in the sound system Skip used to chat with them, whanged and whined for a minute or two and then faded to silence.

Carson was pale but brave. "What the hell was that, Sem? And what could a thing like that be doing out here? It's obviously artificial, a made thing—and MIT never told us there were such things out here."

Kritsky was calm. "We don't know that there *is* anything out there, Art. After all, we can't see out with our own eyes—only through the screen and Skip's circuits between the outside world and the screen. That camp music is pretty improbable, too. I don't mean just that it's stylistically jokey in a knowing way. I mean is it likely that some alien artifact would be able to tune into the ship's sound system and hit audio frequencies we happen to be able to hear and project some structure into? If you ask me, some bright bastard Earthside has programed old Skip down there to mystify us a little and keep us on the hop—or, maybe, they've been finding our work a little dull and this dose of mystification is meant to make copy for you and provide food for thought for me. After all, we could use it."

HUNDREDS of thousands of words of copy, thousands of hours of apologetic philosophizing and many thousands of hands of Black Lady later—when the whispering bulk of the *Olaf Stapledon* was nearing rendezvous with the TCR module beyond the orbit of Saturn—Skip had more news.

"One," he said smoothly, "the TCR module is nowhere detectable within extreme radar range and no signals from the TCR module are detectable on the monitors. Two," he went on, "the rectangular object noted earlier is now in position where the TCR module ought to be, or some object very like . . ."

Skip's report was drowned by the whining and whanging of horror-movie music on the sound system. This lasted for a couple of minutes, faded as before, and Skip resumed his report:

"I am now receiving a radio message on the hydrogen wavelength, square-wave modulated CW signal, reminiscent of code or plain language letter group transmission in standard teleprinter code. There are some puzzling features: notably, there are no gaps in the transmission or frequently repeated spacing signals. On the assumption that the transmission is in teleprinter coded Interanglian alphabet, the content is an uninterrupted sequence of capital letters, the sequence repeating exactly over and over again. This is in no language known to me. I will display this sequence on the screen."



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At once a block of lines of capital letters, set solid, without any sign of word-spacing, leaped into view on the screen. Kritsky whistled.

"I know what that is. Did you ever see a facsimile reproduction of an ancient manuscript copy in Latin? That's just how they used to write in those days, set solid, leaving you to pick out the words for yourself. Get me my Latin dictionary, would you?"

Carson got him the big Latin dictionary. After a few silent minutes spent scribbling, scratching out and scribbling again, Kritsky nodded emphatically.

"Got it. It's in Latin all right, a very simple dog-Latin, like the soldiers' Latin that turned into Spanish, French, and all the other Romance languages. In a free translation, it says:

> YOU CAN'T PLAY IN THE PARK UNTIL YOU HAVE CLEANED UP THE YARD.

If this isn't some joke of Skip's or something some Earthside bastard has programed into him, it's not too hard to see what's happened to that TCR module: it's been *confiscated* as a warning or punishment. I don't know if there's copy in that but there's certainly food for thought."

Skip broke in again, saying: "I have been receiving and storing a further repeated series of sequences. I will now display the second sequence."

The block of letters on the screen was replaced by a different block. After a few more moments spent scribbling and scratching, Kritsky raised his head again, saying with a look of dawning alarm:

"It goes on:

> IF YOU WANT YOUR BALL BACK COME INTO THE PARK WHEN YOU'VE CLEANED UP THE YARD.

and finishes up with a mess of heliocentric coordinates—"

Skip broke in on him, saying, "The coordinates are of a point in space, not far from the prominent star S-Doradus."

Carson shook his head. "It'll be a long time before we can get out *there*. What the hell are we going to do in all that time? Maybe we should all concentrate on—"

Skip interrupted again in his magisterial Skipper manner (with an echo-effect delay in circuit, so that he boomed as if he were pulpited in a cathedral with a wicked echo).

"It is glaringly clear to me," he intoned, "that Man's revealed and manifest destiny must be to . . ."

Carson and Kritsky had just time for one horrified look at each other before the total destruct circuits of the SK.7 cut in and the *Olaf Stapledon* became a plume of fumes falling between the stars. ★



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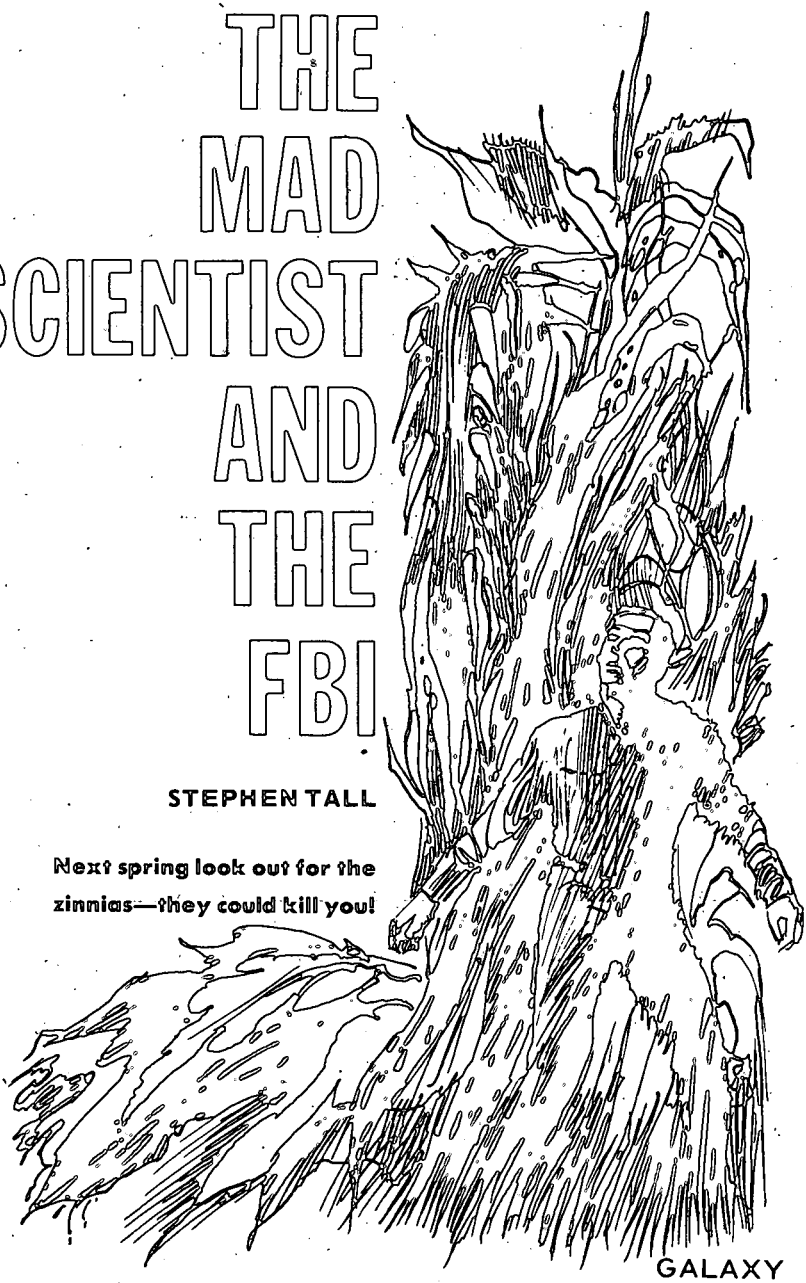
# THE MAD SCIENTIST AND THE FBI

STEPHEN TALL

**Next spring look out for the zinnias—they could kill you!**





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THINGS happen to people. You read about them all the time. They hear from their dead grandmothers. Poltergeists heckle them. They get kidnapped for rides on flying saucers. You know. The silly season is always here.

So you don't have to believe what happens here, either. But some pretty good men do. It's in the records of the Government Plant Research Division at Beltsville. And, particularly, it's got a nice fat folder in the files of the FBI.

None of these records are complete. So this isn't a complete account. The UFO myth is pretty well blown, but do they *have* to come that way? Lately I've been thinking. Hard. And I've got something to think about. See if you don't think so.

Not many men have put one over on the FBI, but we did it. We may have had help, but we did it. By we I mean my old friend Jim-Jam and I. We don't think we're criminals, but that could turn out to be a matter of opinion. Anyhow, what we did I'm pretty sure we'd do again, given the chance. And we see nothing wrong with what we still intend to do.

Back last April, my violet pollinating was clicking along pretty good. Yes, I said violet pollinating. It's a hobby, like poker if you're an editor, or golf and tennis if you're a Vice President. Just as much fun, just as hard to do, takes just as many brains and you come out about the same. You have good days and bad. The moves, strokes or what you will are just a little more long-term.

My experiments were harmless and they kept me off the street. The wife couldn't see that there was much difference—but that's another kind of story. Mostly what I was doing was simple Burbank stuff, watching for variants, selfing some and crossing others, guessing at what I ought to get and second-guessing when I didn't get it. Violets are pretty erratic, anyhow.

Lately I'd been trying another line, the logical next step, I suppose. I'd rigged up an old diathermy machine to where I could get some pretty critical wave-lengths and now and then I'd pick a plant, goose it with a few roentgens and sit back and wait to see what the next generation would be like. And I hasten to say that that sitting back is purely a figure of speech. Just as sure as raising a baby is



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mostly heating baby food and washing baby pants, raising plants from seed is mixing soil, germinating seed, pricking out, transplanting, feeding, transplanting again—and records, records and more records. I had from five to ten thousand plants in my greenhouse all the time. You can see how much time I had left over to make a living.

Did you ever see a red violet? A real good red, a scarlet, a crimson or a vermilion? Neither did I, but I hope to. If Old Mother Nature doesn't juggle the genes around I'll do it with controlled radiation. Between us, we can't miss. Already I've got violets three feet tall, with leaves like a baby elephant's ear. I've got them so tiny you have to look at the blossom details with a hand lens.

And what's the point? If I do get a violet with crimson blossoms—or one that can bark like a dog, for that matter—so what? Well, if you have to ask, there's no good way I can explain it to you. But as atomic experiments continue, and the level of radioactivity in the air rises, maybe you'll be interested in what I've learned when your kids start being born with two heads. You won't like that, even if they *can* yodel and spit at the same time.

But this yarn isn't about your kids or my violets. It's about my friend Jim-Jam, and his little brush with the FBI. Jim-Jam doesn't have a greenhouse, but he's my kind of crackpot, right on. He's a likeable little guy, dried-up as a crackling, with pale, twinkling blue eyes and more bounce than I have at half his age. He's about the only person I know I can exchange ideas with and, for a wonder, his wife likes my wife and I could never tell you why. Jim-Jam has suggested that maybe it's because, way down, neither one of them likes us very much. They can't figure out how we tick.

JIM-JAM has a garden. It does the same thing for him that my greenhouse does for me, except that he doesn't fool around with the tricky energies. In that field he theorizes and I steal his ideas and try them out. They're good, as you'd expect, because Professor James Jameson is Professor of Plant Genetics at the local skull-mill. The kids call him Jim-Jam behind his back, I do it to his face and he couldn't care less in either case. To him a name is just a handle.

Well, this thing is slow getting started, so let's jump into it. You've read the publicity. This is what the newsboys missed.

It was a nice morning last April, as I said, and I was about ready to go to work. I was tying my tie when the phone rang. Myra answered it, and when she came back with a sour look, I knew the caller was Jim-Jam.



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"No sales bonus this month," she said gloomily. "When he calls you in the morning, that means you have to go look. A new rose bloomed during the night!"

"Roses won't be blooming to amount to anything for a month," I said.

"Well, sunflowers, then!" Myra went back to her coffee in the breakfast nook. She's never very happy in the morning and can't see why anyone else should be. I went to the phone.

"Tug, get over here." Myra knows her Jim-Jam. "I think I've got something in your line."

"Not—" I let my voice catch. "Not a red violet, Doc?"

"Nothing to do with violets. I want you to see. Get over here!"

"Look, Doc," I raised my voice, so Myra could hear without straining her ear, "I got a date to sell some cars, so my wife can grow fat in comfort. Can't it wait until this evening?"

"You're a partner, aren't you? They can't fire you. Myra's fat enough now. Get over here."

"Okay, Doc," I said. "Be there in ten minutes."

Of course Myra couldn't hear what he said, but she knew well enough. She wouldn't kiss me goodbye.

I found Jim-Jam over by his row of compost heaps, his white hair flopping over his eyes as he shoveled compost like a coolie.

"Something in my line, I think you said, Doc?" We never say, "Good morning," or, "Hi," or, "Kiss my foot," when we meet. We just pick up the talk wherever we left off last time, whether it's been ten minutes or a week.

"I think so." The skinny little man turned compost for a couple minutes more. "Push that wheelbarrow over here, will you Tug? I want to give my lily beds a couple of shots of this and I've got a ten o'clock lecture."

"And I," I said, "ought to be demonstrating our Deluxe Economy Model to Old Man Barnes this minute. If I don't get cracking he's going to wiggle off the hook. And I could use that seven hundred profit." But I pushed the wheelbarrow.

The professor handed me the shovel, scraped the hair out of his eyes, wagged his head at me and grinned.

"Impatient, eh? Takes a man three-fourths of his life to learn how to live and then he's too old to enjoy it. Fill that up, will you? I need a blow."

I shoveled it full, tossed the shovel on top and got between the barrow handles.

"Where to?" I said. Little he cared if I'd just shined my shoes.

I FOLLOWED him up the path. You wouldn't believe one little man could keep all the beds and rows and borders going that he has in that half acre. Everything neat



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as a pin, and the color, even in April, hits you in the eye.

"Wait a minute!" Jim-Jam stopped by a big square bed, and I nearly piled the wheelbarrow into him. "What do you think of these?"

I took a look. I knew I couldn't hurry him. The bed was a new one, planted in a block pattern, and the seedlings were up a couple of inches or so. They were little gray, leathery looking things.

I pretended to be interested.

"What are they, Doc?"

"Don't you know? Look close!"

I looked. They were still dull-looking little plants to me, with four flat little leaf-like outgrowths making a rough cross, a growing point in the middle. Come to think of it, those leaves looked like cotyledons, but I knew they couldn't be.

"Never saw 'em before," I said.

"Zinnias." The professor chortled. "You claim to be a greenhouse man and don't recognize the commonest garden plants."

"Now wait a minute." I forgot about my newly creased suit, and got down on my knees beside the bed. "Zinnias, my eye! These things have *four* cotyledons. They aren't gymnosperms. Plants like these don't have four cotyledons."

I slid a finger under one of the little plants and it promptly wilted. Honest, it lay flat on the ground, limp as a piece of rag. I looked at Jim-Jam. His eyes were wide.

"Tug," he said softly, "that's new. They never did that before."

"Doc," I said impatiently, "quit stalling. What *are* these things?"

"Zinnias." The professor was stubborn. "Early Flame Giant-Flowered Zinnias. New this year. Fifty cents a package. Forty seeds. Planted them last week—and I know a zinnia seed by now, I should think."

"If those are zinnias I'm a dinosaur," I said.

"That could be," said Jim-Jam. "But zinnias I planted and those I got. Q.E.D."

The plant I had touched was beginning to straighten up. I touched another one and it flopped like the first. I touched half a dozen. They all behaved alike. I got up and dusted my knees.

"Zinnias!" I said, and I made it strong. "What did you call me over here for, Doc?"

Jim-Jam stood staring at the bed, his white hair over one eye, his underlip stuck out like a little kid. You could almost see him think, and I knew than he wasn't ribbing me.

"Tug," he said, "suppose all those seeds came from one plant. Suppose that plant had, somehow, had a controlled, uniform dose of radiation. Wouldn't the embryos in all the developing seeds be affected alike?"

"Now, Doc," I reproved him. "You know better than that. Forty uniform mutations, as far from



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the parental type as those things? Uh-uh. The odds against it would be billions to one." I grinned at him. "Let's face it, Doc. You made a boo-boo. You got novelty plants by mistake, you didn't look too close when you planted, and so you get a surprise when what you planted comes up. Why don't you ask the seed company? I'll bet they can tell you what you've got."

The professor shook his head and his white mane flopped.

"No sir, I know what I planted. I'll have no patent hounds from seed companies snooping in here. Those plants are *different*. As you said, plants like those don't *have* four cotyledons." He started to say something more, thought better of it, stuck out his lip instead.

A thought hit me.

"These," I said, "these are what you called me over to see?"

"You catch on," the professor said. "Not quickly, but you do catch on."

I WISH I could report that Old Man Barnes bought the Economy Model and that I banked my seven hundred. But I can't. The old buzzard didn't like waiting for an hour, so he went across town and paid more money for a rival crate that'll collapse in his driveway in a year. People would rather have service than a solid product.

Myra has her own intelligence channels and she knew about the Barnes business by the time I did. Result, when I came home the dinner was cold, what there was of it, and the atmosphere was colder. I wallowed around in the ice for a while, but finally I gave up and went out to the greenhouse. I worked on records until after midnight.

For the next week I tended to business, made a couple of good sales and Myra began to thaw a little. That doesn't mean she liked the greenhouse any better. She didn't. I'm pretty sure she never will. I'm one man who never can square himself by sending his wife flowers. Even bring her an orchid and she has hysterics. So I bring her candy, which she loves, and which makes her fat.

I didn't even call Jim-Jam the whole week. But I thought some about his little plants. The sensitive-plant, a wilting mutation, doesn't happen very often. I'd never had a hint of that sort of thing in my violets. The more I thought about it, the surer I became that the professor had planted a tropical curiosity by mistake. Every specialization was too well fixed for it to be any other way.

Saturday Myra called the office and left word for me to go directly to the Jameson home after work. Seems we were having dinner with them. It was a break, because I didn't want another rough weekend, but I knew I had to see those plants again pretty soon. I got there about six.



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Myra and Helen Jameson, being sister greenhouse and garden widows, got along better than you would believe. Helen was white-haired, but trim and slim, and she bounced around like Jim-Jam. They were all working on second cocktails by the time I drove up. It was the pleasantest home atmosphere I'd known for quite some days.

Myra kissed me like she hadn't been giving me the deep freeze all week, Helen took my hat, shook my hand, patted my cheek and Jim-Jam slipped me a glass. As soon as we decently could, he and I walked out on the lawn, circled the house and from there it was only a step to the garden. We still carried our glasses.

"How are they, Doc?" I asked.

Jim-Jam looked mysterious. He took a swallow from his glass as he walked.

"Wait and see," he said.

A week is a long time in the life of a new seedling. It had certainly done things to these. They had changed completely.

"Still think they are zinnia mutants?"

I could see the stubbornness flow into Jim-Jam's face.

"I planted zinnia seeds."

I got down on my knees to look closely. It's a habit from the greenhouse, I suppose. There the plants are on the bench and you can get closer without so much exercise.

"Red and blue and yellow-leaved zinnias," I said. "They look like baby century plants that fell in the paint bucket."

"Yeah," the professor admitted. "Striped paint. Go on, touch one."

I did, and the long pointed leaves promptly rolled up from the tips, so that the stem branches were covered with little round bundles, like curlers on a debutante's noggin. I never saw anything like it. And the plants around the one I touched seemed to pick up the disturbance—they rolled up their leaves in turn. In twenty seconds the whole bed looked like a queer frost had struck it. Not a plant had a leaf extended.

Jim-Jam clinked the ice in his glass.

"Well?" he said.

"Doc," I said, "these things give me the willies. If they were mine I'd pull 'em up, throw 'em away and try to forget 'em."

He didn't answer, so I looked up at him. His face had a funny look.

"I did try to thin them," he said. "It's quite an experience. Go ahead, pull one up."

I HATE dares. It's the little boy in me. But Jim-Jam never tells anybody anything. He makes them find out. So I picked out a scrawny little specimen crowded by neighbors, gripped it at the ground level and pulled. It came out all right. But it scared me all the same. Its leaves were already



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rolled into tight packets, and when I held it up it literally shuddered up and down its stem and its naked rootlets writhed and twisted like worms. I didn't know what to do, so I just held on and stared at it.

Then the plant made up my mind for me. The squirming root mass suddenly subsided, the leaves unrolled and the whole plant collapsed. I scratched a hole at the edge of the bed, tucked in the roots and replanted it before I realized what I was doing. I heard Jim-Jam's dry chuckle behind my shoulder.

"I did the same thing," he said. "Too late, though. When the roots stop moving, they're dead."

My plant lay limp on the ground, a flabby thing, its colors fading to a dull gray-brown. Jim-Jam picked it up and put it into an envelope.

"Correspondent of mine down at Beltsville is making histological studies," he said. "He's excited. He says the tissues don't make sense."

I dusted my knees and looked distastefully at the fingers that had just committed murder. "Neither do the plants," I said.

Helen had good solid food such as I hadn't been used to recently. Rare roast beef and steaming white potatoes and fresh asparagus spears; stuff like that. I ought to have made a pig of myself, but I didn't. I couldn't forget that squirming little plant and the sudden, strange way it died. I kept expecting each asparagus tip to wiggle when I ate it.

After that, Myra or no Myra, I kept in touch. If the professor didn't give me a ring before I went to work, I called him. And I sneaked by for a look every chance I got.

Jim-Jam developed a habit of jeering at the plants and making wise-cracks about every change, so I knew they were bothering him plenty. He had reason. During the next week the plants grew almost two feet tall, shed all the hair on their leaves except along the midribs—and learned to dance. It's the truth. I don't mean they started capering up the walk. They swayed. Each plant had its own rhythm, but on still days, when the sun was hot on the bed, the whole layout would do a Disney, all swaying together. You didn't believe it, and when you came close to the bed, they quit. The ones nearest you would begin to roll up their leaves, slowly now, and you almost got the impression they were sulking.

They were crowding the bed but Jim-Jam did no more thinning. I noticed, though, that nothing else grew among what we by now called the rainbow plants. I quizzed the professor about that, because it was the best-kept bed in the garden.

"I've never weeded it," Jim-Jam said. "All the beds about require



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plenty of attention—but not that one. Chickweed sneaks in everywhere, overnight, but not into the rainbow bed. I suppose," he added reflectively, watching me out of the corner of his eye, "they eat everything else."

I reacted, partly because I knew he wanted me to.

"Now, Doc, you know that's silly. Those things aren't predators. They've got no structures for it."

"Maybe," the professor said, "they poison the soil."

"Take samples," I suggested, "and have 'em analyzed. That should be easy."

So we did that, sampling between the plants and close under the roots, taking from the top inch and from six inches down. The college chemists ran the tests and we also sent samples to the Beltsville boys. The results were what you would expect. Nothing unusual, nothing foreign. But before we got the reports we knew the answer to the weedless bed problem. It was simple. The rainbow plants were doing their own weeding.

Because the plants wouldn't show activity when he was nearby, the professor watched them from a distance with a field glass. He noticed that there was a violent swaying session every morning just after sunrise. It didn't last fifteen minutes, but that was the answer. Watching, he saw a plant vary its swaying motion by bending the tip of a sharp-pointed leaf, thrusting it underground and flipping it sharply. A small wedge of earth flew. Then he saw another plant do it,—and another. All he had to do was to pick up the gouged-out bits of earth. Each had a seedling in it, just germinated. Lamb's quarter, chickweed, pigweed, purslane—all the pests that plagued the rest of the garden. The rainbow plants apparently could detect them as soon as they germinated and—Geronimo! out they came.

UP TO this point nobody but Jim-Jam and me had heard of the plants. The professor gardened because he liked it. He hated people rubber-necking around his flowers. Even the local garden club never got in but once. And they made such a mess he never invited them again.

The rainbow plants, though, made their own publicity. Pretty soon they were too big to hide and the bright, raw colors of their two-foot leaves, four inches wide and dagger-pointed on the tips, fairly made a glare in their part of the garden. Those leaves had fuzzy blue and red hair along midrib and veins and keen thin margins, smooth as wax. Knife-like they were and like knives the plants began to use them—on each other. The plants were crammed like cabbages into the bed, crowding each other until they couldn't



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sway. That's when they began to fight—and when the newsboys began to get into Jim-Jam's hair.

From a distance anyone could see an occasional convulsive movement in the bed as a plant lashed at another which touched it. Helen saw it and told Myra and Myra let it get around pretty generally. One reporter came. Jim-Jam threw him out. Now anybody knows that's no way to get rid of the press. They thrive on treatment like that. This one wrote a little teaser story for the evening paper and was back the next day with another reporter and a photographer.

The professor wouldn't allow them on the place. The photographer climbed a tree and took telephoto pictures. In halftone they didn't show up too well, but the two reporters got their heads together on a story about the professor's mysterious experiments with jungle plants that he was reputed to feed on raw meat and live mice. It was the silliest rubbish you ever read—but to sue the paper Jim-Jam would have had to tell the story straight. And that he wouldn't do. He was fit to be tied.

"A man has a right to privacy," he raged to me, his face pink as a kid's under that mop of white hair. "I tell you, Tug, I won't stand for this badgering. I'll ask for police protection."

We were in his living room, nipping down a quick one before I went home for dinner.

"Protection against what?" I asked. "Nobody's stolen anything. They haven't even trampled your garden."

"But I'm a curiosity," Jim-Jam said bitterly. "I'm the Mad Scientist because of a couple of fool newspaper stories. You wouldn't think I'd taught this town's young for thirty-five years!"

"Well," I said, reasonably, I thought, "you can't blame people for being curious."

"I can," Jim-Jam said, "and I will. Why, dammit, I'm not even responsible for the condemned plants. I don't know how they got like that. But who would believe me?"

"Who would believe you'd drink what you have in your hand?" I asked. Doc often likes three fingers of Irish whiskey in half a glass of lime juice. He drinks it warm, no ice. He took a swallow now and rolled it over his tongue.

"What I drink is my own affair," he said heatedly. "It's my liver. And the things that grow in my garden are my own affairs, so long as they stay there. And they will."

"Are you sure? They've done everything *but* leave. Peskiest zinnias I ever did see."

Jim-Jam's topknot went down suddenly as his sense of humor took over. The extra pink went out of his face and he was grin-



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ning as he turned away from the window.

"All right," he said, "so they're not zinnias. But they *are* something rare and strange, something completely new, as near as I can tell." He grew thoughtful and his eyes narrowed. "Okay, I'll take the wraps off. I'll let the bars down. I'll—what else do you do when you let everybody in on something that's none of their business?"

I grinned, too, but I didn't try to supply any more cliches. Words aren't my business. He was serious, though, so I said, "If you're going to do it, do it big, Doc. Put a fence around the bed and get the chief to put a guard there during visiting hours. Only let a few people come at a time and make parents hold their children's little hands. If they're going to expect something unusual, don't discourage them. If you're a Mad Scientist, be the maddest one on your block."

The old boy strolled across the room and sat down in his easy chair. He held up his glass to the light, took a sip, and looked at me over the glass rim. I could be wrong but I think it was an admiring look.

"Tug," he said, "I forget that you deal with the unselected masses. You're right, of course. I'll do it, fence and all!"

"Especially the fence," I said. "Don't forget the hoe handle."

"I haven't," Jim-Jam said soberly.

YOU haven't heard about the hoe handle. As far as I'm concerned it marked a turning point in the way we regarded the rainbow plants. Up to that first incident they were big colorful curiosities, plants from seeds of unknown source that Doc had planted by accident, plants of strange and peculiar habit but plants, just the same. After, I wasn't so sure. I still am not.

It had happened the week before. By then the biggest plants were nearly five feet tall. They had to hold those big knife-like leaves almost straight up to keep from touching the plants around them. And when one plant did tick another, both slashed out with one or more leaves. Make no mistake about it, those leaves *cut*. Every plant looked like a man had been working on it with an axe, and most leaves were as tattered as the ears of a traveling boy dog. Each plant still had its bright unearthly colors, but the entire bed looked like it had just come through a heavy hailstorm.

We didn't know, though, that they ever hit anything but each other. When we came near they always sulked and rolled up their leaves. At least the closest ones did. As I look back on it now, I realize that they were less and less shy as the days passed.



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About the hoe handle: one plant was showing what looked like the beginning of a flower bud in a leaf axil and I pointed it out to Doc that morning. I pointed with the handle of the hoe I was carrying—and I'll always be glad it wasn't a finger. The plant moved faster than I'd ever seen one move. The leaf slashed like a saber and knocked the hoe spinning. I stood there with a silly look on my face, staring at the thing. Doc picked up the hoe. The handle had a deep cut in it.

"From now on, we go around those things," Jim-Jam said—but he didn't look too surprised.

So the reporters got in after all. I think they were a little disappointed, even if the rainbow plants in color pix were something you'd hardly believe. But when crowds of people were around they wouldn't do anything, wouldn't even move. And the reporters, I imagine, had begun to believe their own stories.

The fence was important, though. The plants were near their time of blossoming and we wondered what new antics would go along with the flowers. We found out. No dogs' den ever had a battle for survival like the one that went on inside that fence. All the action occured at night, so nobody saw it, but it really happened.

The day after the fence was complete Jim-Jam found the first dead plant plastered against it. It was corpse-gray and collapsed, just like the little one I had pulled up weeks before. The plants beside it must have ripped it up and thrown it bodily out of the bed. Doc fished it out with a pruning hook, carefully, you can bet, and shipped the whole carcass off to Beltsville. It brought a government gardener, complete with Ph. D., notebooks, cameras and microscopes, practically by return mail. But by the time he got there the plants had thrown out three more of their fellows.

I was there when Doc hooked out number four. The Beltsville boy, a sandy-haired stringbean who looked like he smelled something ungood, plainly didn't believe what he saw.

"I've dissected the previous specimens, Doctor," he said. "As I told you before, the morphology is incredible; the cell structure completely new. But I can't believe that the "plants," if that's what they are, can dig each other up."

"Give him the pruning hook, Doc," I suggested. "After all, he's your guest. Let him poke one."

Jim-Jam did, and he did, and the plant converted him then and there. The plant he punched was a big six-footer, with keen, sleek leaves that were mostly blue, with long streaks of bright crimson lying along the veins. Two of those leaves whistled downward. One of



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them smashed itself on the steel hook, but the other caught the thin wood handle at just the right angle and sheared through it as smoothly as a machete could have done. The pruning hook dropped to the ground between the plants.

"Like to go in and get it?" Jim-Jam asked.

THE new man looked at the pole in his hand, minus hook, and with the pull-wire dangling. Then he looked at Jim-Jam and me. We looked back and he was the better sight. He was scared pea green.

He backed away, slowly turning so pale I was afraid he was going to faint.

"Can they get out?" he asked. We could hardly hear him.

"They're plants, Doctor," Jim-Jam said. "They have roots in the ground. They can't move about."

The botanist stopped when he was twenty feet from the fence. He dug out a cigarette, but his hand shook so he couldn't light it.

"Fantastic!" he muttered. "Doctor, those things are murderous."

It took two highballs to put some spunk back into him, and even they didn't make him too brave. All the time he stayed in our town, and it was close to three weeks, he never went near the bed again. He sat on Doc's terrace and watched with a field glass, and when the plants would put on a flurry he'd sweat and have to have another drink. But he dissected the carcasses, made his reports and, since after the first day or two he bought his own liquor, Doc tolerated him.

There were plenty of carcasses. After the first flower buds showed it was plain murder inside that fence. For the next week the Beltsville boy—Wallace, his name was; no kin to anybody we know—had from two to five dead plants to work on. Jim-Jam was afraid they'd all be killed off. He was close to right. At the end of the week only two were left, and the bed was as neatly cultivated as if Doc had gone over it with that little four-fingered cultivator he always brags about.

A couple of days later he called me early. You would have thought his house was on fire.

"Tug, get over here! Somebody sober besides me has got to see this!"

"What—" I began, but he cut me off.

"Don't argue, dammit! And don't fool around dressing—come in your shirt-tail, but move! This won't go on all day."

The receiver clicked, or slammed, rather, and there I stood with my teeth in my mouth. I had no choice. I roared across town without hat or coat and still wearing my bedroom slippers. I jumped out of the car and swished around the house to the terrace. Doc was there, with a pair of bi-



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noculars. He had a pair for me and he didn't say a word; just held them out.

The plants had bloomed. With the eight-power glass I could see them like they were at arm's length, and I didn't believe it. I lowered the glass and looked at Jim-Jam.

"That's silly," I said. "The flowers are entirely different."

Jim-Jam stopped me with a wave of his hand.

"Watch," he commanded.

So I watched. One plant had erupted foot-long sprays of flaming red trumpets; the other had wide petaled single blossoms of deep skyblue. The plants were swaying, every wicked-looking leaf keeping time to waltz music we couldn't hear, every flower stalk undulating gently back and forth, and the very flowers themselves opening and closing as if they were mouths. And there wasn't even a breeze.

Then I saw it. One of the blue flowers, stretching out on its long snake-like stem, fitted itself neatly over the mouth of a red trumpet and clung there a moment. Then it swung away. And all the while the dance never stopped.

IN THE next quarter of an hour we saw that happen time after time. The blue flowers always seemed to be the aggressors, and, since there were fewer of them, they were busy.

"I'd give a pretty," Jim-Jam said, "to see what goes on when they touch like that."

"Mutual pollination?" I guessed. "Doc, let's go flower picking."

Jim-Jam looked at me with a half grin. His white hair was flopped over one eye, his chin and jaws were covered with white stubble. He looked like a cross between a middle-aged pixie and a goat.

"Think you can outrun them?" he jeered. "Especially in your bedroom slippers?" Then his pale eyes squinted in thought. "We might do it with a pruning hook and an apple picker."

We got one of each and wrapped the long wooden handles with wire. That way we figured they might be able to take the beating. We could have saved ourselves the trouble. When we went near the fence the plants acted like they had when they were small. They cringed away from us and their leaves drooped. I poked the hook at a cluster of red flowers and the plant overlapped its leaves tightly against its stalk, with the blossoms covered. I had to pry away the leaves to snip off the cluster, and when I did the plant shuddered all over. It was like taking a baby from its mother.

The blue-flowered plant behaved exactly the same, but I nipped off a couple of blossoms. And by the time we got them back to the house the reds weren't red and the



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blues weren't blue. They had all turned the cadaver-like, fishbelly gray that the dead plants always were. But the structures were there.

My lucky guess about mutual pollination was probably right. Each flower was perfect, with pistils and stamens. The pollen was well developed—and definitely different in the two kinds of flowers. Wallace staggered in about nine o'clock. We turned what was left of the specimens over to him, and they shocked him sober.

His report back to Beltsville this time really got results. The next plane from Washington brought two nice young men with snap-brim hats and brown raincoats and credentials that proved that they were exactly what they looked like they were: agents from Mr. Hoover's FBI. Wallace himself, incidentally, couldn't take it any more. He left after that last report. He never came back.

"If your plants make seed and they blow around the country, they can be a menace to public safety," the young G-men told Jim-Jam. "We're detailed to watch, in the public interest, until all seeds are collected and disposed of under government supervision. We hope you understand and will cooperate."

Naturally the old man got hopping mad and naturally he blew his stack.

"Watch and be damned!" he roared at the G-boys. "Go out and sit on the fence, where you can see better! And," he added as he banged back into the house, "I hope they bat your ears off!"

THE FBI has set up many a stakeout but I'll give odds that these were the first two agents ever detailed to watch a flower bed. But watch it they did, in eight-hour shifts around the clock. Doc got over his miff in a day or so and let 'em sit on the terrace and Helen would bring the night man coffee; little things like that. We all got to know each other pretty well. They were good boys.

The rainbow plants set their fruit—and the fruits were not alike. The blue-flowered plant produced what looked like oversized lemons, with leathery rinds and color that progressed from a normal green to a rich orange yellow. On the red-flowered plant the fruits were double, elongate, with a hard shell covered with a loose brown chaff.

The FBI sat right through September. No wonder public enemies get discouraged. The fruits on each plant hung plump and almost mature, and we all knew that whatever was going to happen was just about due. We had collected unripe fruits under government supervision, so we knew that the lemons had several large, hard, bullet-like seeds; that the seeds in the hard-shelled fruits



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were small and flat, with feathery seedcoats. How those seeds were going to be disseminated was the subject of some powerful debates on the professor's terrace. They always ended the same way, with Doc needling the FBI.

"When they drop their seed," he told them, "you won't be able to do a thing about it. Those lemons may fire bullets ten miles away. The hard fruits may explode like hand grenades. How'll you stop 'em?"

It was a poser, but one day the G-boys came up with the answer.

"Doctor," one of them asked, "would you say the fruits are ripe? And if that is so, are the seeds mature?"

I remember how Jim-Jam looked that afternoon. He was sitting on the flagstone floor of the terrace, resting his back against a post. He was working on his third three fingers of Irish and lime juice, and his eyes had a loose, relaxed, wicked twinkle. He reminded me of some old reprobate of a beachcomber, leaning against the ribs of a half-buried wreck. The grin on his stubbly face was a *knowing* grin.

"Yes, to both questions," he said and rolled a spot of the Irish over his tongue.

"Then," the other G-boy said, "we've got our orders. We'll harvest the whole crop—right now."

They had left nothing to chance. They had brought a couple of pruning hooks and heavy gloves. They even had plastic bags to store the fruit in.

Jim-Jam must have expected something of the sort. I know I had. Anyway, he made no protest and of course I knew why. He had done his harvesting the day before.

"These boys are smart, Tug," he had told me, "and they're following orders. Whatever the orders are, there's nothing I can do about them. But those plants are mine. Maybe I can't keep the government from taking them over, but I'm going to have some seed."

And while Helen had coaxed the guard into the house for some ice cream he had collected two fruits of each sort. They were in my greenhouse refrigerator that minute.

"They're smart boys," I remember him repeating, "but I don't think they've counted the fruits."

IT BEGAN to sprinkle a little rain while the G-men got their harvesting outfit together and as we went down the garden path it turned into quite a shower. We ducked back into the entranceway by the terrace and watched while the shower became a dashing downpour. The sky became dark overhead. Sharp gusts of wind smacked sheets of water into the entranceway, so we went into the living room and watched from the win-



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dows. Lightning crackled and thunder rumbled as it often does in early fall storms.

It only lasted a few minutes. We went out again and the sky was almost clear. Water ran down the garden paths. The shrubbery dripped. Everything had a cool fresh smell.

We were at the fence of the rainbow plant bed before we actually looked at them. One look was enough, but it took time to believe it. The plants lay collapsed and fish-belly gray. At least Doc and I didn't have to be told that they were as dead as stones.

I climbed the fence and walked on ground where no man had walked since spring. I lifted the flabby, cadaver-colored leaves and let them drop again. Twenty minutes earlier those plants had been vital, bright with color, wickedly active and heavy with fruit. Now they were dead and there wasn't a sign of a fruit on either of them.

"Well, boys," Jim-Jam said, "they beat you. I couldn't tell you how they would do it—but I thought they would."

We went back along the walk to the house, leaving the plants where they died. The FBI boys took the checkmate like men. One of them closed the book with only one last question.

"Doctor, would you have any idea what became of those fruits?"

"Not the foggiest," Jim-Jam said gravely. "Maybe they were planted there by design and the planters came back for the harvest. Maybe that wasn't a natural rain. It came at a mighty handy time. I'll bet my weeding hoe that two blocks from here it didn't even lay the dust. Ask the newspaper boys. Their imaginations are better than mine."

So now you know all the FBI knows. In fact, you know a little more. You know about the seeds Doc has, carefully tucked away and waiting for spring. So you might as well know the rest of it. I swiped a couple of fruits, too, not only from under the noses of the FBI but from under Doc's nose as well. I've been dosing the seeds with controlled radiation, using intensities and times of exposure that have always given me maximum results with the violets. I've built a heavy cage in one corner of the greenhouse and made a seedbed from soil from Doc's garden. In March I'm going to do a little planting of my own.

I may regret it. Myra would jaw my ear off if she knew about it. But I can't stay out of it. And no matter what I do, I'm convinced that this isn't the end of it. Something funny is definitely going on. Next time a little more may happen. I hope I'm there but it may not happen to Jim-Jam or to me. It may happen to you. They don't *have* to come by UFOs, you know.

So sit tight—but stay loose! ☆



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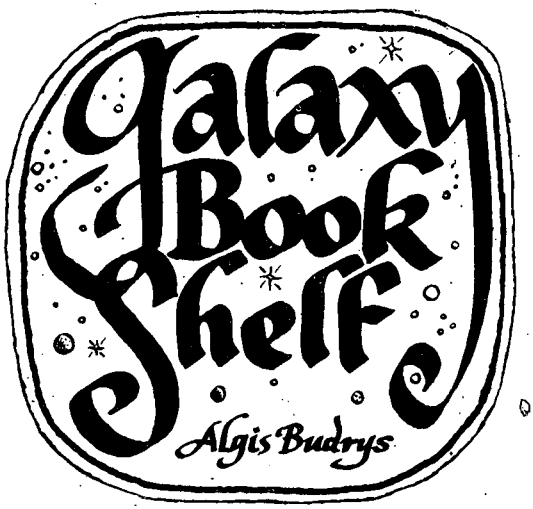


LET us speak of the classics.

The members of the Science Fiction Writers of America, urged by Robert Silverberg, have selected a list of all-time greatest sf stories, compiled in *The Science Fiction Hall of Fame* (edited by Robert Silverberg, Doubleday, $7.95), a 558-page book containing 26 stories—with additional volumes to come, one assumes.

There is one copyright date more recent than 1960 (1963, for Roger Zelazny's *A Rose for Ecclesiastes*). There are three stories from the 1930s—*A Martian Odyssey*, *Twilight*, and *Helen O'Loy*. (Weinbaum, Campbell, del Rey—as if you didn't know). The rest—twenty-two of the 26 greatest sf short stories and novelettes ever written by anybody to the knowledge of the SFWA membership—are from the 1940s and 1950s.

Astonishing!

Where is the fabled, warblighted "Golden Age" of the late 1930s? Represented by *Helen O'Loy*; the Weinbaum and the Campbell are from another era.

But, surely, you'd think this volume can't possibly be omitting such classics as *The Roads Must Roll*, *Microcosmic God*, *Nightfall*, and *The Weapon Shop*? They're in—from the 1940s. So are *Mimsy Were the Borogoves*, *First Contact*, *Scanners Live in Vain*, and *Arena* and *Huddling Place*.

All those classics date from the 1940s . . . the very time in which John Campbell's fillers and blurbs themselves promised a return to far better things when the "wartime pressures" were off and ab-



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sent hands returned to the plough. The only absent hand of any eventual significance was that of Cyril Kornbluth, earning a Bronze Star in the Ardennes and the bad heart that would eventually kill him, author of *The Little Black Bag*, (1950), and almost certainly a complete cypher to Campbell in the 1930s.

Clearly, in the minds of today's writers who are SFWA members, the "Golden Age" has migrated at least a decade forward in time.

What may astonish some is that it hasn't migrated any farther than that. Silverberg's selection process—constrained by writers' stories competing with themselves—may have had something to do with it. But one would think that if the New Wave had any real steam up, this book would not in so many ways duplicate not only the content but the tone of *Adventures In Time and Space*—which is still the classic sf anthology, and dates from 1947.

Curiouser and curiouser. There are several stories here, from the 1950s, which are just about the only memorable stories by their particular authors. Not that Jerome Bixby did not come very close very often, nor that Tom Godwin can't write acceptably, but they to this date remain the men who wrote *It's a* Good *Life!* and *The Cold Equations*, respectively. Then, we have several stories which are outright stunts; venture to say duds—*That Only a Mother, Born of Man and Woman, Mars is Heaven!* and *The Nine Billion Names of God*. (*The Star* placed 15th in overall standings, and is Clarke at his best short-story level, only one cut below his talent as a novelist. But *Nine Billion* placed eleventh and is therefore exhumed here. This my stomach cannot reconcile with any pretense of a professional appraisal).

There's something that seems a little thin about the 1950s selections, is what I'm trying to say. There are plenty of strong individual entries—*Bag, Coming Attraction, Surface Tension, Flowers for Algernon*. But perhaps, although the Golden Age has paged forward a few leaves on the calendar, it's not only not ready to leap into the late 60s, it's on shaky footing in the 50s.

Fantastic! Such a result from such a progressive crew.

And, by the way, the book is as advertised—a basic one-volume library of the short science fiction story. You should have it. You should also leave space beside it.

THE classics. Yes. We know we have arrived, for the stories of our youth are now so perfectly embalmed that the students have been coming to visit them.

They sent me late *The Shattered Ring*, subtitled "Science Fiction and the Quest for Meaning," by



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Lois and Stephen Rose. (John Knox Press, $3.50). The meaning in question is a religious one. The purpose of the book is to demonstrate an instinctive religious concern on the part of the prominent (usually "classical") sf authors, and to derive a guidance or at least a *bon voyage* telegram from them.

Now, please understand the context of the remarks to follow. I think artists—all artists—are closer to the future than anyone else. I even think a rare few have some ability to work with this phenomenon in a meaningful way; a way that results in an exposition of truth. I doubt if science-fiction-writing artists are *per se* any closer to this phenomenon than any other kind of artist, but on the other hand they are probbaly no farther, and they present a handy population for practical study. And even for hypothetical example.

But to study an animal, you must first catch it, then tag it, then follow it, else you'll become rather confused, and your notes will be gibberish. As in:

"Modern science fiction can be traced to the guiding spirit of John W. Campbell, who . . . ushered in . . . the classic period of science fiction. New talent emerged and developed—Olaf Stapledon, Isaac Asimov, Robert Heinlein, Theodore Sturgeon, A.E. van Vogt, Jack Williamson, Frederik Pohl."

What are you going to do about respecting a scholarly study that lumps in two of the very oldest modern science-fiction writers, plus Pohl, (whose reputation and output as a writer were negligible before *Gravy Planet* with Cyril Kornbluth in *Galaxy*, 1953), with Asimov, Heinlein, Sturgeon and the Dick Wakefield of sf, van Vogt?

Nor does it help establish the Roses' credentials when the most important quality they can ascribe to this falsely homegeneous school is "their creation of a body of literature in which the limits of technology, space and time were greatly expanded. Men travelled to the moon and Mars, but now they also found their way to other space-time complexes."

But this isn't so. The focus of the true Campbellian was a narrower, stricter one than that of the foregoing Williamsonian superscience writer. If the Roses had then properly bracketted Stapledon back in pre-Williamsonian time with Wells (and with Jack London), they might have done something about perceiving and analyzing a steady anti-totalitarian shift toward a humanism of the individual, as distinguished from a pre-totalitarian humanism of the mass, and it would have made sense to cite *The Space Mer-*

*(Please turn to page 191)*



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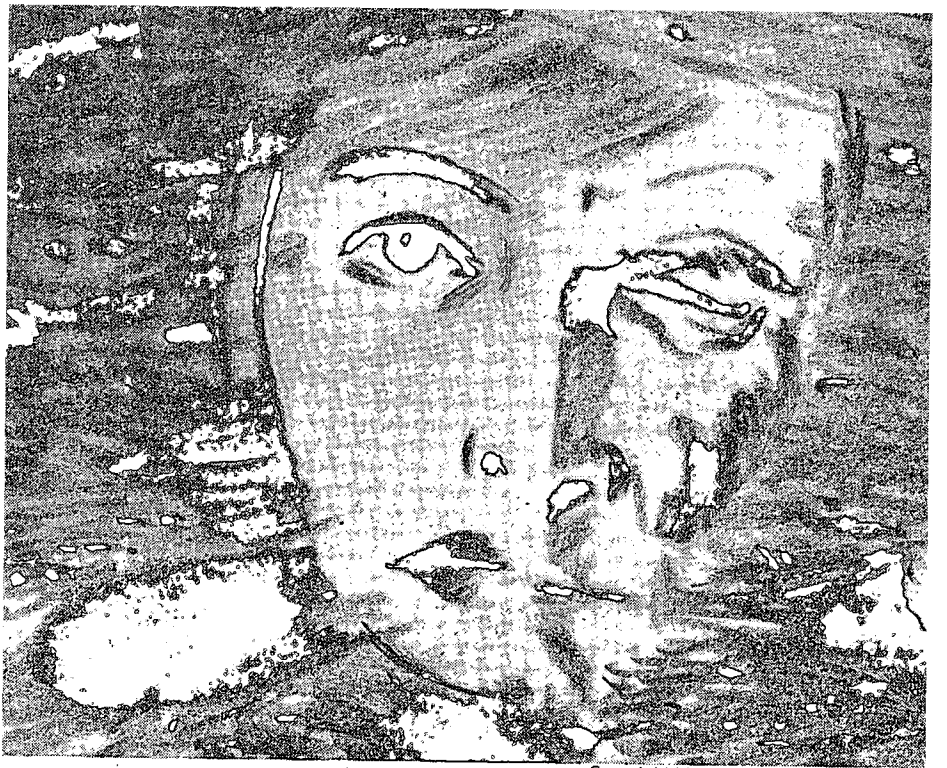

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## *WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE*

*When medical science cannot let him live as he wants, yet will not let him die, aged but lusty and extremely wealthy Johann Sebastian Bach Smith sets his financial empire in order and assigns his best friend and legal adviser, Jacob Salomon, the task of securing a warm body into which his brain can be transplanted. The operation proves successful. He recovers to find himself wearing the body of his lovely secretary, Eunice Branca. A dialogue ensues between the brain and the body—highly revealing to both.*

*Never before have two lives become so strangely and intimately linked. Shock follows shock as Johann Sebastian Bach Smith learns what it means to be a beautiful woman with a zest for life and love—and Eunice discovers the uses of the power his brain wields. Body and brain team up to make a shambles of a court test of Johann's legal identity and make arrangements, via artificial insemination, for the body to bear the brain's child.*

*A love story? Yes. But one without precedent—as is the strange composite creature known as "Miss Smith."*



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## XXIII

DABROWSKI handed her out and Fred locked the car. They escorted her to and into the lift. Joan Eunice looked around. "This must be where it happened."

Her driver said, "Eunice, I wish you would change your mind."

"Anton, Tom and Hugo should have driven me today, but I was afraid the poor dears would get upset when they saw the inside of this lift. I thought you and Fred could stand it. Fred, are you nervous?"

"You know damn well I am, Eunice."

"Over what? *She* entered this life *alone*. I've got you two with me."

"Well . . . you're a stubborn one. I don't know what Ski is going to do but *I* am going to wait outside the door until you come out." (Eunice, what do you do with stubborn men?) (It's hard, twin, especially when they love you. You had best use female jiujitsu—let them have their own way until it turns out its your way.) (I'll try.)

"Fred, Eunice lived here for years. Utterly safe . . . except for one mistake. I have the radio link and I promise you both, solemnly, that I won't stir outside Joe's door until I *know* you're waiting."



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"We'll be waiting, all right—all the time. Right, Ski?"

"Right! Eunice, you don't even know Joe Branca still lives here."

"But I do. It's just that he didn't pay his phone bill, so they cut him off. Joe's *still* there, or was at sixteen o'clock yesterday. Look, how does this sound? First, you know that Joe wouldn't hurt me, don't you? Anton?"

"Oh, sure. Joe might not want to see you—but Joe Branca would put a fly outdoors before he would swat it."

"Then I'm safe as long as I'm inside with Joe. But you're right, he may not want to see me. He may not let me in. Or I may be inside only minutes. So wait an hour, then go home. I'll call you when I want you to take me home."

"Two hours?" suggested Fred.

"All right, two hours. But if I don't come home tonight, you are *not* to come back and buzz Joe's door. You can come back tomorrow at noon and wait an hour, or even two, if that will make you feel better. And again the next day. But I'll stay in Joe Branca's studio a full week if it takes that to make his mind easy. Or a month, damn it! Or anything. Boys, I've *got* to do this; don't make it harder."

Anton said glumly, "All right. We'll do it your way."

"Am I 'Eunice' now? Or 'Joan Eunice?'"

He grudged a smile. "You're Eunice. *She* would do it."

"That's why *I* must. Look, darlings—"she put an arm around each of them—"last night was wonderful . . . and I'll find a way to manage it again. Perhaps next time Mr. Salomon is away—you know he fusses over me like a mother hen. But you two do also—and you must *not* . . . except when you're guarding me. Right now I *must* try to find a way to soothe Joe's soul. But I'll be your playmate another day. Be darlings and kiss me; the lift is about to stop."

They did so; she hooked up her veil. They left the lift and headed toward the Branca studio—Joan found she knew the way, as long as she didn't stop to think.

She stopped at the door. "She always kissed you goodbye? Here, with Joe watching?"

"Yes."

"If he lets me in, kiss *me* goodby the same way. Just don't stretch it out; he might close the door. Oh, I'm shaky!" (Steady down, Boss. Om Mani Padme Hum. Don't use the button; try our voice on the lock. 'Open Up!' Like that.)

"Open up!" Joan said. She unhooked her veil, faced the door.

The lock started clicking but the door remained closed. A transparency flashed in the wall: PLEASE WAIT. Joan stood in front of the door peep, wondered if Joe was scanning her. (Eunice, will he let us in?) (I don't know, Boss. You shouldn't have come. But you wouldn't listen to Jake . . . nor to *me*.) (But I am here. Don't scold me—help me.) (I'll try, Boss. But I don't know.)

Through the door, not as soundproof as her own doors, Joan heard a high voice: "Joe! *Joe!*" (Who's *that?*) (Could be anybody, Joe has lots of friends.)

The door opened. She saw Joe Branca standing in it. He was



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dressed in much-worn shorts which had been used repeatedly for wiping paint brushes. His face showed nothing. A girl, a wrapper pulled sketchily around her, looked out from behind him. "See? It's *her!*"

"Gigi—get back. Hello, Ski. Hi, Fred."

"Hi, Joe."

Joan tried to keep her voice steady. "Joe, may I come in?"

He finally looked at her. "You want to, sure. Come in, Ski. Fred." Joe stood aside.

Dabrowski answered for them. "Uh, not this time, Joe. Thanks."

"Roz. Other time, any. Welcome. Too, Fred."

"Thanks, Joe. See you." The guards turned to leave as Joan started to enter—she checked herself, remembering that she must do something. "Boys!"

Fred kissed her quickly, nervously. Dabrowski did not kiss her; instead he held his mouth to hers and said almost soundlessly, "Eunice, you be good to him. Or, damn, I'll spank you."

"Yes, Anton. Let me go." Quickly she turned, went inside past Joe, waited. Slowly he refastened the hand bolts, taking an unnecessarily long time.

HE TURNED and glanced at her, glanced away. "Sit?"

"Thank you, Joe." She looked around at the studio clutter, saw two straight chairs at a small table. They seemed to be the only chairs; she went to one of them, waited for him to remove her cloak, realized that he was not going to do so, then took it off and dropped it, sat down.

He frowned at her, seemed uncertain, then said, "Coffee? Gigi! Java f' Miss Smith."

The girl had been watching from the far end of the room. She tightened her wrapper and went silently to a kitchen unit beyond the table, poured a cup of coffee and prepared to flash it. Joe Branca went back to an easel near the middle of the room, started making tiny strokes on it; Joan saw that it was an almost finished painting of the young woman addressed as "Gigi." (That's a cheat pic, Boss.) (A what?) (Project a photo onto sensitized canvas, then paint over it. Joe does them if someone wants cheesecake, or a cheap portrait, or a pet's picture—but claims they aren't art.)

(Can't see why, Eunice; it's still an original oil painting.) (I can't, either—but it matters to an artist. Boss, this place is filthy, I'm ashamed of it. That bitch Gigi.) (She lives here, you think?) (I don't know, Boss. Could be Joe's sloppy housekeeping. He likes things clean but won't stop to do it. Only two things interest Joe. Painting . . . and tail) (Well, he has both, looks like. I see he's kept your Gadabout.) (I'll bet it won't run by now. Joe can't drive.)

Gigi fetched coffee, placed it on the table. "Sugar? Isn't any cream." She leaned closer, added in a fierce whisper, "You don't belong here!"

Joan answered quietly, "Black is fine. Thank you, Gigi."

"Gigi!"

"Yes, Joe?"



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"Throne."

The girl turned and faced him. "In front of *her?*"

"Now. Need you."

Slowly Gigi obeyed, untying her wrapper as she moved, dropped it as she stepped up onto the throne, fell into pose. Joan did not look, understanding her re-luctance—not modesty but unwillingness to be naked to an enemy. (But I'm *not* her enemy, Eunice.) (Told you this would be rhino, Boss.)

Joan tried the coffee, found it too hot and too bitter after the delicately fragrant—and expensive—high-altitude brew Della prepared. But she resolved to drink it, once it had cooled.

She wondered if Joe recognized what she was wearing. La Boutique had reconstructed, at great expense, a costume Eunice Branca had once worn, one in last year's "Half & Half" style, scarlet and jet, with a tiny ruffle skirt joining a left-leg tight to a right-side half sweater. Joan had hired the most expensive bodypaint artist in the city and had rigidly controlled him in reconstructing the design Eunice Branca had worn with it, as nearly as memory and her inner voice could manage.

(Eunice, was Joe too upset to notice how we dressed?) (Boss, Joe sees *everything.)* (Then he's gone back to painting *not* to notice us.) Maybe. But Joe wouldn't stop painting for an H-bomb. That he let us in at all is a blue moon—in the middle of a painting.)

(How long will he paint? All night?) (Not likely. He does that only for a real inspiration. This one's easy.) It did not look easy to Joan. She could see that the artist was working from an exact cartoon, one that looked like a dim photograph of Gigi as she was posed —but he was working also from his model. Yet he was not following either model or photograph. He was enhancing, exaggerating, simplifying, making flesh tones warmer, turning flat canvas almost into stereo, realistic as life, warmer than life, sensuous and appealing.

Perhaps it was not art —but it was more than a photograph. It reminded Joan of a long-dead artist Johann had liked. What was his name —used to paint Tahitian girls on black velvet? Leeteg? (Eunice, what do we do now? Walk out? Joe doesn't seem to care either way.) (Boss, Joe cares *dreadfully.* See that tic on his neck?) (Then what do I *do?)*

(Boss, all I can tell you is what I would do.) (Wasn't that what I asked?) (Not quite. Any time I came home and found Joe working from another model I kept quiet and let him work. First I would get out of my working clothes, then shower and get off every speck of paint and makeup. Then tidy things—just tidy, heavy cleaning had to wait for weekends. Then I would get things ready to feed them, because Joe and his model were going to be hungry once they stopped. They always did stop; Joe won't overwork a model. Oh, he sometimes painted me all night but he knew I would ask to stop if I got shaky.)

(Are you telling me to strip down? Won't that upset him still



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more?) (Boss, I'm not telling you to do *anything*. This visit wasn't *my* idea. But he's seen our body thousands of times—and you ought to know by now that nakedness isn't upsetting, it's relaxing. I felt that it was rude to stay dressed when a model was nude—unless I was certain she was easy with me. But I'm *not* telling you to do this. You can go look through the peep and see if Anton and Fred are still there—they will be—and unbolt the door and leave. Admit you can't put Humpty Dumpty together again.)

(I suppose I should.) Joan sighed, stood up—kicked her sandals off, peeled the half-sweater down, shoved the ruffle skirt down and got out of the tight. Joe could not see her but Gigi could—Joan saw surprise in her eyes but she did not break her pose.

Joan looked at her and put a finger to her lips, then picked up dress and cloak and sandals, headed for the bath unit while avoiding (she thought) Joe's angle of vision. She hung her clothes on a rack outside the bath and went in.

IT TOOK only minutes with soap and shower to rid her body of jet and scarlet. (Face makeup off, too?) (Forget it, you don't wear as much as I used to. Towels in the cabinet under the sink. Or should be.)

Joan found one clean bath towel, three face towels, decided that it wasn't fair to grab the last bath towel. She managed to get dry with a face towel, looked at herself in the mirror, decided that she was passable—and felt refreshed and relaxed by the shower. (Where do I start?) (Here of course. Then make the bed but see if it needs changing. Sheets in the box with bed lamp on it.)

The tiny bath took little time as scouring powder and plastic sponge were where they almost had to be. The toilet bowl she was forced to give up on—she got it clean but stains left by flushing water did not respond to scrubbing. Joan wondered why a civilization that could build mighty spaceships could not cope with plumbing?

Or was it a civilization?

She washed her hands and went out. The bed seemed to have been slept in no more than a couple of nights; she decided it would be presumptuous to change sheets. As she was straightening the bed she noticed lipstick on one pillow—turned it over. (Gigi?) (Might be, Boss, it's her shade. Proves nothing.)

(Now what?) (Work around the edges—don't *ever* touch Joe's stuff. You can pick up a tube of paint and dust under it . . . but *only* if you put it down exactly where you found it.)

The edges kept her busy for a time. It seemed likely that Joe must have noticed her—but he gave no sign. The painting seemed finished but he was still working on it.

The sink was loaded; she found soap powder and got busy.

Once she had dishes washed, dried and put away, and the sink as sparkling as the dishes, she looked over the larder. (Eunice, did you



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keep house with so few staples?) (Boss, I didn't keep many perishables on hand—but this is skimpier than *I* ever kept it. Joe doesn't think about such things. I never let him shop—because he would come back with some new hungry friend, having forgotten the bread and bacon and milk I had sent him for. Try the freezer compartment.)

Joan found some Reddypax in freeze—dinners, a carton of vanilla ice cream almost full, spaghetti, pizza of several sorts. There were more of the last, so she decided she could not go wrong offering them pizza. What else? No fresh vegetables— Fruit? Yes, a small can of fruit salad, hardly enough but she could put it over scoops of ice cream, plus wafers if she could find any. Yes, lemon snaps. Not much of a meal but she didn't have much to work with. She started getting things ready.

Set the table for three? Well, she was either going to be accepted—or sent home; she set it for three. (Eunice, there are only two chairs.) (The kitchen stool adjusts in height, Boss.) (I'm stupid.) (Wouldn't have bet you could find your way around a kitchen at all.) (Maybe I wouldn't have learned if Mama had had a daughter. I'll bet I've cooked more meals than you have, sweetheart—not that this is cooking.)

Just as Joan had everything laid out she heard Joe say, "Rest, Gigi."

She turned around. "Joe, will you two have supper now? It's ready to flash."

Joe Branca turned at her voice, looked at her—started to speak and with pitiful suddenness went to pieces.

His features broke, he started to sob, his body slowly collapsed. Joan hurried toward him—and stopped abruptly. (Boss! Don't touch him!) (Oh, God, Eunice!) (Don't make it worse. Gigi has him. Down on the floor, fast Om Mani Padme Hum.)

Joan dropped into lotus seat. "Om Mani Padme Hum." Gigi had given Joe a shoulder, eased him down. He sat on the floor, his head against his knees, sobbing, while Gigi knelt by him, her face showing the ages-old concern of a mother for a hurt child. "Om Mani Padme Hum." (Om Mani Padme Hum.) (Can't I help her, Eunice?) "Om Mani Padme Hum." (No, Boss. Ask Gigi to help *you*.) (How?) "Om Mani Padme Hum." (Ask for a Circle. Om Mani Padme Hum.)

"Gigi! Help me form a Circle. *Please!*"

The girl looked up, looked very startled, as if seeing Joan for the first time.

"Om Mani Padme Hum. Help me, Gigi—help us both."

Gigi slid into lotus seat by her, knee to knee, reached for Joan's left hand, took Joe's right hand. "Joe! Joe, you must listen! Close the Circle with us. Now!" She started chanting with Joan.

Joe Branca stopped sobbing, looked up, seemed not to believe what he saw. Then, slowly, he straightened his legs, moved until he filled the third side of the triangle and tried to assume the Padmasana. His paint smeared shorts were too confining; they



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got in the way. He looked down, seemed puzzled, then started unfastening them. Gigi let go his hand and Joan's, helped him get them off. Then he settled easily into lotus, reached for their hands. "Om Mani Padme Hum!"

As the Circle closed Joan felt a shock through her body, somewhat like electricity. She had felt it before, with three, with four, but never so strongly. Then it eased off to a sweet feeling of warmth. "Om Mani Padme Hum."

The prayer rolled around the Circle, rolled back, and was chanted in unison. They were still softly whispering when Joan stopped feeling or hearing anything—other than utter peace.

"WAKE. Wake up. Come back."

Joan fluttered her eyelids, felt her eyeballs roll down. "Yes, Winnie? I'm awake."

"You said you had supper ready to flash. Want to do it? Or shall I?"

"Oh." She became aware that the Circle was still closed. "I'll do it. If I may."

Joe looked inquiringly into her face, his own face serene. "You okay? Good vibes?"

"She's okay," Gigi answered. "Go take a pee and we'll get supper on. Wash your hands; I left turpentine in the medicine cabinet."

"Okay." He got up, gave a hand to each of the girls, pulled them to their feet together, turned to do as he was told.

Joan followed Gigi to the kitchen unit, noticed the clock of the flash oven. "Gigi, is that clock right?"

"Near enough. Do you have to leave? I hope not."

"Oh, no, I can stay. But how long did we hold the Circle?"

"An hour, hour and half, maybe longer. Long enough. Does it matter?"

"No." Joan put her arms around the other girl. "Thank you, Gigi."

Gigi put her arms over Joan's, hugged her. "Thank *you.* This is the first time I've seen Joe truly at one with the All, accepting his karma, at peace with it, since, uh, since—"

"Since Eunice was killed?"

"Yes. He's kept coming back to the crazy notion that, if he hadn't gone to Philly to see his Maw, it wouldn't have happened. He knows that's not so—but now he knows it in his belly. I can tell." (Boss? Say hello to Gigi for me.) (Break cover?) (Oh, hell, we'd better not. I don't *think* she'd tell Joe—but we can't risk it. And things are okay the way they are.)

"Gigi, I think Eunice would want to thank you. If she could. Things look okay the way they are, now."

"Looks like. Say, what do I call you? I can't say, 'Hey, you!' But 'Johann Sebastian Bach Smith' seems like a hell of name for a girl."

"My name is Joan, now. Uh, my full name is 'Joan Eunice Smith.' But my middle name is, well, sort of a memorial. Rozzer?"

"Roz. That's nice, I think that's perfect—Joan Eunice." (I think *you're* perfect, Boss. You *did it!* You know why I didn't want to come here? I was scared for Joe . . . but twice as scared for *me.*)



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(I knew, sweetheart. We both were scared. And so was Joe.)

"Gigi, better not use my middle name. Joe might be upset. Bad vibes."

Gigi shook her head. "I don't think so. If I'm wrong, if he needs to soak in the Circle some longer, tonight we've got the right Circle. Might not have, if he found out later."

"All right, Gigi, I'll tell him."

"Yes, but wait until after we eat. A Circle is fine and I can stay in one all day, if needed. But I'm starved. Sandwich about five hours back and I don't eat much breakfast." Gigi pulled her closer, kissed her. "So let's eat."

"Somebody say 'eat?' "

"In a minute, Joe; we got to talking. And we need a crack at the plumbing, too. First dime is yours, hon; I'll flash the packs."

"Go ahead, Gigi."

"Oh, come along. Joe, you flash the packs."

"—like your 'Eunice Evans Branca Memorial,' Joe. Because I don't want anyone *ever* to forget Eunice. Especially me."

Joe Branca nodded soberly. "Is good. Eunice 'd like." Suddenly he smiled. "You okay, Joan Eunice." He put down his cup, started stacking dishes, and added: "Getup you had on, same like one Eunice had."

"It was one I had seen her in, Joe, so I had one made like it."

"Good job. Dress, not skin paint. Sign painter, maybe?"

"Joe, I didn't have anyone of your skill to do that; I had to use whom I could find. Uh, is it possible that you might paint me—body paint, I mean—sometimes? Professional job, professional fees, no obligations?"

He smiled and shook his head. "Not cosmetics man, Joan Eunice. Sure, paint body for Eunice, she liked. Gigi, too, when she wants. Paint *you*, sure. But no fee."

"Joe, I won't take up professional time of an artist without paying. But I see your point. Cosmetic painting for your wife is one thing—but your real work."

"But fun," he answered. "Maybe do jet-and-scarlet job right before you go home, huh?"

"That would be sweet of you, Joe, but don't bother; I wouldn't be showing it, I'll go straight home. But let me ask one question, please, about body paint. Do you remember that you once painted Eunice as a mermaid, and she wore it to work?"

"Sure."

"Well— Gigi, this was when I was Johann Smith and very old and very ill. I hurt all the time but couldn't stand heavy dosage of painkillers. Had to tough it. But here was Eunice, lovely as a flower and cute as a kitten, painted to look like a mermaid, and—Joe, this is the silly part. I don't think I noticed any pain all day long, I was so busy trying to figure something out. And never could. Was that a *real* brassiere Eunice had on? Or paint?"

Joe looked smugly pleased. "Paint. Fool-the-eye." (Boss, I *told* you that.) (Yes, little imp—and sometimes you fib, too.)

"You certainly fooled *my* eye. I could *see* those big sea shells, I could almost feel their rough tex-



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ture. Then Eunice would turn in profile—and I wouldn't be sure. I spent that whole day staring while trying to seem not to. Joe, you're a great artist. It's a shame you prefer canvas to skin."

"Not quite right. Like to paint *skin* on *canvas*. Fool-the-eye forever. Not just one day."

"I stand corrected. Like that one." Joan nodded at the easel. "Gigi, let me do the dishes, please. I want to."

"Pile in sink," Joe ordered. "Inspiration. Two-figure compo."

"Okay, Joe," Gigi answered. "Joan Eunice, do you feel up to posing late? Joe said 'two-figure' so he means you, too. But I warn you, when Joe says 'Inspiration' you don't get much sleep."

"No," Joe denied. "Can short it. Cheat some. Get pose right, shoot eight, nine, ten shots. Then—" He suddenly looked distressed, turned to Joan. "Maybe not here tomorrow? Or could be, not want to pose. Damn, I forget! Think you sleep here. Crazy. Damn!"

Joan said, "I don't have to be anywhere at any time, Joe, and I would be greatly honored to pose for you. But—" She turned to Gigi. "May I stay tonight? Is it all right?"

"Oh, sure!"

"I wonder. Since you showed me your wedding ring I've been wondering how much I am butting in."

Gigi giggled. "Hon, if you think that's a ring in Joe's nose—well, *I'd* better never think so. Joan, I left Sam a good month before I let Joe give me that ring and marry me. Cubical and comical, couldn't believe he meant it. I can't think of another couple we know who are married. It's nice—but I still get the giggles. Sure you stay if you want to. We got a cot to set up — not much but we'll put Joe on it."

(Watch it, Boss! This is dynamite—ten to one *Joe* won't be on that cot.) (Of course not. *I* will be. Think I'm a fool?) (Sadly, I do, Boss. You're lovable—but you just barely have sense enough to stay out of lifts. Not out of beds.) (Joe wants me to pose, I pose! If he wants anything else, he can have that, too! *Anything.*)

(That's what I thought.) (Eunice, Joe doesn't want *me*. Gigi is his woman now.) (Okay, twin. But when did I last hear you say that marriage isn't a form of death?)

Joe Branca appeared to regard the matter as settled; housekeeping details seemed no interest to him. He said, "You oil after shower?" and reached out and fingered Joan's left ribs. "No. Gigi."

"Chop, chop, Joe." Gigi ducked into the bath, returned with a bottle of olive oil. She said to Joan, "Lanolin is as good but I'd rather smell like a salad than a sheep. Joe, get her ribs; I'll do her leg. Then we give you a quick oiling all over, hon, and wipe you down. Get all off that your skin doesn't absorb. Mmm, some red paint back here where you can't see, but olive oil cuts it. Joan, I've had twice as good a complexion since Joe has been making me take care of my skin."

"You have a perfect skin, Gigi."

"Joe's a tyrant about it. Now for a wipedown."

"Not too much wipe," Joe



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warned. "Need highlights in cheat shots."

"Easy on the wipedown. Some oil on me, Joe?"

"Da."

"Okay, Maestro. Joan, we'll polish each other bone dry before we go to bed. If we're not too tired to care —no importa, disposable sheets. Joe, are you going to tell your slaves what this pic is?"

"Sure, need acting. *Gut* acting. Lez pic."

"*Huh?* Joe, you can't put Joan in such a pic. You *can't.*"

"Wait, Mate. I don' draw comic books. You know. Pic so square can hang in church. But symbols so gut-loaded old butch pays top money. But— Joan Eunice, can change face if you say?" He looked anxious.

"Joe, paint the way you want to. If somebody recognizes me in one of your paintings I'll be proud."

"OKAY." Rapidly Joe Branca built a low platform of boards on boxes, heaped floor cushions on top, covered it all with a ragged heavy cloth. "Throne, Gigi first. Gigi butch, Joan Eunice sweetheart." He moved them like clay figures, shoving them into position like a butcher handling meat, so that Gigi was supported by cushions while she held Joan in her arms and looked into Joan's eyes. Joan's position fig-leafed Gigi; Joe raised Joan's left knee so that she fig-leafed herself. Then he placed Gigi's right hand under Joan's left breast, not cupping it but touching—stepped back and scowled.

—stepped forward, changed the composition slightly, moving them so little that Joan could not guess what difference it made. Apparently satisfied, he shoved cushions in more tightly so that each could hold the pose without strain.

He placed a platter just below them, slanted with careful casualness. "Is Greek lyre," he said. "Title, *Bilitis Sings.* Song just pau, action not yet. Golden moment between." He looked at them carefully, still scowling. "Joan Eunice, you knocked up?"

Joan was very startled. "Does it show? I haven't gained an ounce." (Erase and correct — nineteen ounces.) (Yes, but not enough to *show.* Aside from pizza just now, I've stuck to Roberto's diet. You know I have.)

Joe shook his head. "Figure not show. You *happy,* Joan Eunice?"

"Joe, I'm dreadfully happy about it. But I haven't told anyone yet."

"Be easy, Louisie; Gigi don' yatter." He smiled in benison and Joan saw for the first time how beautiful he could be. "What counts, you happy. Happy mama, happy baby. Knocked-up broads look different. Better. Skin glows, muscles firm, folds under eyes fill out. Whole body better tone. Eye can *see* but most can't see what they see. Lucky I got you for model right now. But solves problem been eatin' me."

"What, Joe? How?" (Eunice, is this all right?) (Sure, twin. Joe approves of babies as long as he doesn't have to bother with them. He's pleased that you are happy —and doesn't think about how it



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happened or what you'll do about it. But not callous. If you were broke he would take you in and try to support your baby and still not ask where you got it. He doesn't find the world complex, dear—so it isn't . . . to him.)

"Puzzle problem. You *look* like Eunice, how else? But look *better.* Impossible. Know why now. Any broad looks best doin' her thing."

"Joe, do you think pregnant women are beautiful later? Say eight, or nearly nine months gone?"

"Sure!" Joe seemed surprised that she would ask. "*More* beautiful. Healthy, happy woman ready to drop—how not? Top symbol of The All. Shut up now. Work."

"Please, Joe, one more question. Will you paint me when I'm big as a house? Between eight and nine months? Could be a cheat job. Might have to be—I might not be able to pose very long when I'm heaviest."

He smiled in delight. "You bet, Annette! Artist don't get that chance much. Most broads silly about it. But now shut up. Must look gutsy, so *think* gutsy. Don' act—*be.* Sweaty, eager. Joan Eunice, Gigi's got you set up, eager. But scared. Virgin. Gigi, you just eager. Maybe gloating, but *think,* don't *do.* Not even face. Just *think.*"

He stopped to reposition lights, scowled at his models, changed his lights a little, brushed an oily rag on Gigi's right shoulder and breast. "Is right! Nipples up? Joan Eunice, can't you get 'em tight? Try thinking about men, not Gigi."

"I'll fix it," Gigi assured him. "Listen, darling." She started whispering, telling Joan in blunt detail what this ancient Grecian Lesbian was about to do to the virgin helpless in her arms.

Joan found that her breasts tightened until they hurt. She wet her lips and looked back at Gigi, hardly noticed that they were being photographed.

"Break." announced Joe. "Off throne, pau tonight. Got good shots."

Joan straightened up, peered across the room at the clock. "My goodness! Blackbirds already?"

"So bed," he agreed. "Pose tomorrow."

Gigi said, "I'm still going to do those dishes, Joe. Set up the cot."

"I'll do them, Gigi."

"I'll wash, you can wipe."

By the time they finished, Joe was in the cot and apparently asleep. Gigi said, "Which side do you like, hon?"

"Either one."

"Crawl in."

## XXIV

JOAN woke with her head on Gigi's shoulder. Gigi's looking at her helped Joan to remember where she was. She yawned and said, "Good morning, darling. Is it morning? Where's Joe?"

"Joe's getting breakfast. Had enough sleep, dear?"

"Guess so. What time is it?"

"I don't know. The question is, are you rested? If not, go back to sleep."

"I'm rested, I feel grand. Let's get up."



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"All right. But I charge one kiss to get past me."

"Outrageous," Joan said happily, and paid toll.

But Joe was not at the kitchen unit, he was projecting the photographs he had taken the night before. Gigi said, "Look at that, Joan. Forgotten all about offering to get breakfast."

"It's no matter," Joan said softly.

"Don't bother to keep your voice down, Joe can't hear when he's working. Unless you shout. Well, let's scrounge, then we'll try to get him to eat. Hmm . . . not much to offer a guest."

"I don't need a big breakfast. Juice and toast. Coffee."

"No juice." Gigi poked around futilely. "I could give you a Reddypak. Spaghetti or something. I've got to grocery-shop. Send Joe out for groceries and he comes home with a new picture book and some paint, happy as a kid. No use scolding him."

Joan Eunice caught an undertone in Gigi's voice, said softly, "Gigi, are you broke?"

Gigi did not answer. She kept her face turned away, got out half a loaf of bread, prepared to make toast. Joan persisted, still speaking quietly, "Gigi, I'm rich, I suppose you know. But Joe won't take a dime from me. You don't have to be that stubborn."

Gigi measured out powder for six cups of coffee. Then she said almost as softly, "Joan, I was a whore when Big Sam and I were together. Somebody had to pay the rent and half his pupils never paid what they promised, and the rest paid so little it hardly made up for the coffee and doughnuts they ate. Hell, some of them came to class just to eat. So somebody had to work. I never hustled men much—Sam didn't like it if I made it with another man—unless it was a swing scene that he had set up. But an old butch is often generous. When we had to have money I would go sit in one of the Lez coffee shops and bring some money home—Sam didn't mind that.

"I finally got wise that I was being used, not just supporting him. Those swing scenes—a guru needs a young chela for openers or it won't get off the ground. Joan, a woman will do anything for a man—but she hates to think it's one-way street. Now take Joe. Doesn't sell many paintings and we usually have to split fifty-fifty to get them hung. But Joe doesn't *use* a woman no matter how thin things are." She looked around at Joan.

"When I first posed for Joe he paid me guild rates, none of this kark about a fin now and another fin when he sells the picture. He had some money from Eunice. Insurance, I suppose. But Joe is a soft slob and everybody borrowed it and everybody spent it and nobody paid it back and it was gone before I shacked in with him and started minding his money. Somebody's paying the rent and utilities on this studio. You, maybe?"

"No."

"You know about it?"

"Yes. A man who greatly admired Eunice took care of it. Joe can live here the rest of his life if it suits him. And I can drop a hint and the phone will be turned back



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on. The phone was an oversight when the rent and power and water and such were arranged for."

"We don't need a phone. I think half the people on this level used Joe's phone as a free public phone —some still try and get sore when I tell 'em there's no phone here, please go away; Joe is working. Uh, that man who admired Eunice —named 'Johann' maybe?"

"No, not Johann and his name isn't Joan now. Gigi, I can't tell you without his permission and I don't have it. Has Joe ever said anything about the rent?"

"Truthfully I don't think he's thought about it. He's a child, some ways, Joan. Art and sex— doesn't notice other things until he bangs his nose into them."

"Then maybe he wouldn't notice this. I've got my car radio link in my purse, I can call for it. If you tell Joe you've got to grocery-shop, he'll let you go, won't he?"

"Oh, sure. Won't even fuss— even though he has his heart set on painting us all day today."

"So you tell him you must and I offer to take you in my car. We can pick up a *big* load, with a car and two guards to carry for us. Maybe Joe won't suspect that I've paid for it. Or maybe you can tell him that a picture sold."

Gigi looked thoughtful. Then she sighed. "You tempt me, you cuddlesome little broad. But I had better hold off and eat pizza till we sell another painting. And we will. Best not to monkey with a setup that works, I think."

(She's right, Boss. Leave it alone.) (But, Eunice, there's not a thing for breakfast but coffee and dry toast. That's no matter but there are only four Reddypax in there and three pizzas—we ate three last night. A few other items, not much. I *can't* leave it alone.) (You've *got* to leave it alone. You trying to cut off his balls? Or split him up with Gigi? Gigi's good for him, she'll find a way. Do I, or do I not, know more about Joe than you do?) (You do, Eunice—but people have to eat.) (Yes, Boss, but it doesn't hurt to miss a couple of meals.) (Damn it, girl, what do *you* know about being hungry? *I* went through the 'thirties.) (Okay, Boss, louse it up. I'll keep quiet.) (Eunice—*please*! You said I did fine last night.) (So I did, and you certainly did. Now keep up the good work by leaving them alone or by finding some way to let Gigi come by groceries honestly . . . but don't *give* them anything.) (All right, sweetheart, I'll try.)

"Gigi, here in the fridge—bacon grease in this can?"

"Yes, I save it. Can be useful."

"Can indeed! And I see two eggs."

"Well, yes. But two eggs split three ways is sort of feeble. But I'll fry one for you and one for Joe."

"Go soak your head, cuddle baby; I'm going to teach you Depression cooking I learned in the nineteen-thirties."

Gigi Branca suddenly looked upset. "Joan, you gave me goose bumps. I can't realize how old you are—but you're not, really—are you?"

"Depends on which rubber ruler you use, dear. I remember the



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Great Depression of the 'thirties; I was about as old as you are now. By that scale I'm ninety-five. Looked at another way I'm only weeks old and not able to crawl without help. Always making mistakes. But by still a third way to measure it I'm the age of this body—Eunice's body—and that's how I like to be treated. Don't let me be a ghost, dear—hug me and tell me I'm not." (What you got against ghosts, Boss?) (Nothing at all, some of my best friends are ghosts—but I wouldn't want my sister to marry one.) (*Very* funny, Boss—who writes your gags? We *did* marry a ghost—in Dr. Olsen's examining room.) (Ouch! Sorry about it, Eunice?) (No, Boss darling, you're just the old goat—old ghost, pardon me—I want for our little bastard.) (Love you, too, Busybody.)

Gigi hugged her.

"First we melt the bacon grease and make sure it's not rancid—or not too rancid. Then we soak the bread in it and fry it. We scramble the eggs and since we don't have cream to stretch them, we use what we find. I'll settle for powdered milk, or flour, or corn starch. Even dry gelatin. We don't salt the eggs, the grease may be salty enough—salt to taste afterward. But if you have Worchestershire sauce, or A-1, or anything like that, we add a little before we scramble. Then we spoon this goop onto six slices of fried bread, two to a customer, and garnish with paprika, or dried parsley, or chopped most anything, to make it look fancy. This is creative cookery á la WPA. We set the table the best we can manage—fancy cloth and real napkins, if you have them. A flower, even an artificial one. Or a candle. Anything to swank it up. Now—do I fry the bread while you stretch the eggs? Or vice versa?"

JOE reluctantly came to the table, absent-mindedly took a bite—looked surprised. "Who cooked?"

"We both did," Joan answered.

"So? Tasty."

"Joan showed me how and we'll have it again some time, Joe," Gigi amended.

"Soon."

"All right. Joan, you can read, can't you?"

"Why, yes."

"Thought you could. There's a letter from Joe's mother, been here three days. I've been meaning to find somebody to read it but Joe's kept me busy posing—and Joe is particular who reads his mother's letters."

"Gigi, Joan's company. Not polite."

"Joe, am I company? If I am, I won't finish breakfast and I won't pose—I'll call Anton and Fred and go home!" ('That's telling him, Fat Lady!') (That's a vulgar joke, Eunice.) (I'm vulgar, Boss. Come to think about it, you're about as vulgar as they come yourself, though I wasn't sure of it till I woke up inside your head.) (I give up. But Joe can't make us 'company.') (Of course not. Quiver your chin and make him kiss you—he's never kissed you with the lights on.)

Joe said soberly, "Sorry, Joan Eunice."



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Joan pouted her lip. "You ought to be. You ought to kiss me and tell me I'm family. *Not* 'company.' "

"She's right," agreed Gigi. "You've got to kiss and make up."

"Oh, hell." Joe stood up, came around to Joan Eunice's chair, took her face, tilted it up and kissed her. "Family. Not company. Now eat!"

"Yes, Joe. Thank you." (He can do better.) (So we both know.) "But, Joe, I won't read your letter unless you want me to. Gigi, you startled me when you indicated you could not read. I thought I could tell by the way a person talks. Is it your eyesight?"

"Eyes are okay. Oh, I'm a real Talking Woman. Had some coaching, done some little theater. Probably should have learned to read—though I can't say I've missed it. Computer fouled up my pre-school test records and I was in sixth grade before anybody caught it. Then it was sort o'late to change tracks and I stayed on the 'practical.' There was talk of putting me through a remedial but the principal put his foot down. Said there wasn't enough budget to handle the ones that could benefit from it." She shrugged. "Maybe the fact that he was a third had something to do with it. Anyhow I don't miss it. Joe, shall I find the letter?"

"Sure. Joan Eunice is family."

Joan found Mother Branca's handwriting difficult, so she read the letter to herself to be sure she could read it aloud—and ran into trouble. (Eunice! How do I handle this.) (Twin, never tell a man anything he doesn't need to know. I censored as necessary. Even some of your mail, when you were sickest.) (Know you did, baggage, as I reread some you had read aloud.) (Boss, some went straight into the shredder. And this one should have gone there—so censor it.) (You were married to him, sweetheart, but I'm not. I have no *right* to censor his mail.) (Twin, between being right and being kind, I know which way *I* vote.) (Oh, shut up, I won't censor Joe's mail!)

"Takes a while to get used to strange handwriting," Joan Eunice said apologetically. "All right, here it is:

"*Darling Baby Boy. Mama don't feel so—*"

"Don't read all," Joe interrupted. "Just tell."

"That's right" agreed Gigi. "Joe's mother puts in a lot of kark about noisy neighbors and their pets and people Joe never heard of. All he wants is news. If any."

(You see, twin?) (Eunice, I'm still not going to censor. Oh, I can leave out trivial gossip. Uh, maybe edit the wording.) (You damn well better, Boss, and you know it.)

"All right. Your mother says her stomach is troubling her—"

(*Mama don't feel so good and can't seem to get no relief nohow. The medicare man says it's not stomach cancer but what does* he *know? Sign says he's an internist and everybody knows an internist is a student, not a real doctor. What do we pay taxes for when just a student can half kill me like I was a dog or a cat or something they're always cutting up behind*



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*-locked doors like they say on teevee?)*

"Joe, she says that her stomach has been bothering her but she's been getting tests from an internal medicine man—that's a doctor who specializes in such ailments, they are very learned—and he has assured her that it isn't cancer or anything of that sort."

(*The new priest ain't no help. He's a young shot that thinks he knows it all. Won't listen. Claims I get just as good treatment as anybody when he* knows *it ain't true. You got to be a nigger to get anything around here. We white people that built this country and paid for it are just so much* dirt. *When I go to medicare clinic, they make your Mama wait while* Mexican *women go in first. How about that?*)

"She says that there is a new priest in your parish, a younger one than the last, and that he has investigated and has reassured her that she is getting the proper treatment. But she says that she sometimes has to wait a long time at the clinic."

"Why not?" said Joe. "Got nothin' but kill time. Don' work."

(*Annamaria is going to have a baby. That snot priest says she ought to go to a Home. You know what terrible places those Homes are and its* Un-American *to bust up families. They don't do that in the Old Country and that's what I told the Visitor. You'd think the way they throw away money on people that don't deserve it they could spend a little on a decent family that just wants to be left alone and not bothered. The other Johnson twin—not the one that dropped out, the one I told you was out on parole again—got busted again and about time! There's a family the Visitor could look into—but oh, no, he just told me to mind my own business.*")

"Someone named Annamaria is pregnant."

Gigi said, "Which one is that, Joe?"

"Baby sister. Twelve. Maybe thirteen." Joe shrugged.

"Well, your parish priest thinks she ought to go into a home for expectant mothers but your mother feels that she would be better off at home. There is something about a neighbor family named Johnson."

"Skip."

*Baby Boy, Mama don't hardly never get a letter from you since Eunice died. Ain't there no letter-writer in your block? You don't know how a mother worries when she don't hear from her little boy. I watch the mail box every day, be sure nobody swipes it fore I get it. But no letter from my little Josie —just ads and once a month the Check.*

"She says she hasn't heard from you in a long time, Joe. I'd be glad to write one for you before I go, anything you dictate—and send it by Mercury to be sure she gets it."

"Maybe. Thanks." Joe did not seem enthusiastic. "See later. Paint first. Any more? Just tell."

(Eunice, here comes the tough part.) (So skip it!) (I *can't*!)

(*I seen you in the teevee and* almost *dropped dead when you said you gave away a thousand million*



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*dollars you had every right to. Don't your own mother mean nothing to you? I didn't raise you and love you and take care of you when you busted your collarbone to be treated like that. You go straight to that Miss Yohan Bassing Bock Smith and tell her she can just wipe that nasty sneer off her face because I want my rightful share of whats coming to me and* I'm going to get it. *I already been to a lawyer and he said he'd take my side for fifty-fifty as soon as I paid him a thousand dollars for expenses. I told him he was a thief. But you just tell that stuck-up Miss Smith to pay up or my lawyer will put her in jail!!!!*

*Sometimes I think the best thing is just pack up everybody and go visit you till she pays up. Maybe just stay. Would be hard to leave all our old friends here in Philly but you need somebody to keep house now that you haven't got no wife to do for you. It won't be the first time I've made sacrifices for my darling boy.*

*Your Loving Mother.*

"Joe, apparently your mother watched my identity hearing on video and heard your testimony. She seems disappointed to learn that you gave money to establish a memorial to Eunice, when you could have kept it."

Joe made no comment.

Joan went on: "She says she may pack up all the family and pay you a visit but the way it's phrased I don't think she will. That's all except she sends you her love. Joe, I can see how your mother could be disappointed in what you did about—"

"My business. Not hers."

"May I finish, Joe? From this letter I think she must be poor and I have been poor myself and know how it feels. Joe, *I* think that your memorial to Eunice was a wonderful thing, the most gallant tribute of a husband to the memory of his wife I've ever heard of. I heartily approve and I think Eunice must feel honored by it." (I do, Boss. But maybe he overdid it, huh? Jake could have set up a little annuity for Joe—eating money, I mean—with part of it. But Joe never did know how to do anything part way—whole hawg, or nothing; that's Joe.) (Maybe we can fix it, dear.)

"Joe, if I paid your mother an allowance—you *know* I can afford it—it wouldn't be *you* accepting money from Eunice's death."

"No."

"But I would *like* to! She's your mother, it would be sort of an additional memorial to Eunice. Say enough to—"

"No," he repeated flatly.

Joan Eunice sighed. "I should have kept quiet and arranged it through Jake Salomon." She memorized the return address, intending to do it anyhow. "Joe, you are a lovable man and I can see why Eunice was devoted to you—I've fallen in love with you myself and I think you both know it—without any intention of crowding you out, Gigi; I love you just as much. But, Joe, sweet and gallant as you are . . . you are a bit stiff-necked, too." (Sure he is, Boss darling, but it's no use trying to change people. So drop it.



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You didn't need to sneak that address; I could have told you.)

"Joan."

"Yes, Gigi?"

"Hate to say this, hon—but Joe's right and you're wrong."

"But—"

"Tell you later, we'll talk while we pose. Grab the bathroom if you need to while I put dishes to soak; Joe wants to start."

JOAN was surprised to learn that she could visit with Gigi while they posed. But Joe assured her that he had the expressions he wanted from the photographs; he simply wanted them to hold still. He took even more pains to get them arranged than he had for the camera. Talk did not bother him as long as it was not to him. Nevertheless Joan tended to whisper while Gigi used the normal tones of a face-to-face conversation.

"Now I'll tell you why you must not send money to Joe's mother. But wait a sec—he's done it again. Joe! *Joe!* Put on your shorts and quit wiping pigment on your skin." Joe did not answer but did so. "Joan, if you've got money to throw away, flush it down the pot but don't send it to Joe's mother. She's a wino."

"Oh."

"Yeah. Joe knows it, her Welfare visitor knows it; they don't let her have her family allowance in cash—she gets one of the pink checks, not a green one. Just the same she'll take groceries around the corner and trade 'em for muscatel. That stomach trouble—forget it. Unless you want to help her drink herself to death. No loss if you did. The kids might be better off."

Joan sighed. "I never will learn. Gigi, all my life I've given money away. Can't say I did any good with it and I know I've done lots of harm. Me and my big mouth!"

"Your big heart, dear. This is one time not to give it away. I know, I've had a lot of her letters read to me. You trimmed that one, didn't you?"

"Did it show?"

"To me it did—because I know what they sound like. I learned from the first one never again to have somebody just read them aloud to Joe; he gets upset. So I listen—I'm a quick study, used to learn my sides and cues just from two readings aloud when I was finding out I wasn't an actress—and then I trim it to what Joe needs to hear. Figured you were smart enough to do it without being told and I was right—except that you could have trimmed it still more and Joe would have been satisfied."

"Gigi, how did such nice a person as Joe—and so talented—come from such a family?"

"How do any of us happen to be what we are? It just happens. But—look, it's never polite to play the dozens, is it?"

"I shouldn't have asked."

"I meant it isn't polite for *me* to. But I'm going to. I've often wondered if Joe was any relation to his mother. He doesn't *look* like her; Joe has a picture taken when she was about the age he is now. No resemblance."

"Maybe he takes after his father."



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"Well, maybe. But Paw Branca I'm not sure about; he left her years back. If Paw Branca is his Pop. If she has any idea who his father is."

"I guess that's often the case. Look at me—pregnant and not married; I can't criticize."

"You don't know who did it, dear?"

"Well . . . yes, I do. But I'm never, never, *never* going to tell. It suits me to keep it to myself and I can afford to do it that way."

"Well—none of my business and you seem happy. But about Joe—I think he's an orphan. Somebody's little bastard who wound up with this bitch, though I can't guess how. Joe doesn't say so. Although he never talks much—unless he has to explain things to a model. But his mother has had one good influence on him. Guess."

"I can't."

"Joe won't drink. Oh, we keep beer for friends when we can, but Joe never drinks it. He won't touch pot. He won't join a Circle if it calls for a high. You know how it is with drugs—all of them against the law but as easy to buy as chewing gum. I could show you three connections in this one complex where you can buy you-name-it. But Joe won't touch any of it." Gigi looked sheepish. "I thought he was some kind of a freak. Oh, I was never hooked but I couldn't see any harm in an occasional trip with friends.

"Then I shacked with him and he was broke and I was, too, and groceries were our only luxury and —well, I haven't touched anything since he married me. And don't want to; I feel grand. New woman."

"You certainly look happy and healthy. Uh, this 'Big Sam,' did he have a habit?"

Not a habit. But Sam would eat, drink, or smoke anything somebody else paid for. Oh, he didn't mainline—doesn't fit the image for a guru and needle marks show—and he was proud of his body."

"What did you do before you were his chela?"

"His meal ticket, you mean. Same thing—model and whore. What else is there to do? Babysat. Served drinks in my skin for a while but they let me go when they found a girl who could write —discrimination and I could have fought it as I never got my orders mixed up; my memory is better than people's who have to write things down. But, hell, no use trying to hang on when they don't want you. Joan, you said you'd been giving money away all your life."

"I exaggerated, Gigi. Never had much until after World War Two. I just meant I wasn't stingy even as a kid; when every nickel came the hard way."

" 'Nickel?' "

"A five-cent piece. They used to be minted from a nickel alloy and were called that. Dimes and even dollars used to be silver. We actually had gold money when I was a kid. Then during the Great Depression I was flat broke for about six months—and other people helped me—and then later I helped some, sometimes the same people. But giving money away on a large



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scale I didn't start until I had more money than I could spend or wanted to invest, and the tax laws at that time fixed it so that you could do more giving it away than by keeping it."

"Seems a funny way to run things. But of course I've never paid taxes."

"YOU just think you haven't. You started the day you were born. We may eliminate death someday but I doubt if we'll ever eliminate taxes."

"Well . . . I won't argue it, Joan, you must know more about it than I do. How much money have you given away?"

"Oh, it didn't amount to more than a few thousand until after War Two and most of that was loans I knew I would never collect. Kept records for years—then one day I burned the record book and felt easier. Since then— I'd have to consult my accountant. Several millions."

"Several *millions*? Dollars?"

"Look, cuddly, don't be impressed. After a certain point money isn't money, it's just bookkeeping figures or magnetized dots in a computer."

"I wasn't exactly impressed. Confused. Joan, I don't have any feeling of any sort for that much money. A hundred dollars I understand. Even a thousand. But that much is like the National Debt; it doesn't mean *anything* to me."

"Nor does it to me, Gigi; it's like a chess game—a game played just for itself, and one I'm tired of. Look you wouldn't let me buy groceries even though I am helping to eat them. Would you accept a million dollars from me?"

"Uh . . . no! It would scare me."

"That's an even wiser decision than the one you made before breakfast. But page Diogenes!"

"Who's he?"

"Greek philosopher who went around searching for an honest man. Never found him."

Gigi looked thoughtful. "I'm not very honest, Joan. But I think I've found an honest man. Joe."

"I think so, too. But, Gigi, may I say why I think you were smart to say No? Oh, it was a gag, sort of, but if you had said Yes I would not have welched. But I would hate to do it to you. May I tell you why? What's wrong with being rich?"

"I thought being rich was supposed to be fun."

"It's fun, some ways. When you're really wealthy—and I am—money is power. I'm not saying that power isn't worth having. Take me, if I hadn't had that much raw power, I wouldn't be here chatting with you; I'd be dead. And I *like* it here, with your arms around me and Joe painting a picture of us because he thinks we're beautiful—and we *are*. But power works both ways; the man—or woman—who has it, can't escape it. Gigi, when you're rich you don't have friends; you just have endless acquaintances."

"Ten minutes," said Joe.

"Rest time," said Gigi.

"Huh? But we've *been* resting."

"So get up and stretch, it'll be a long day. If Joe says we've posed fifty minutes, we have; he uses a



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timer. And have a cup of coffee; I'm going to. Coffee, Joe?"

"Yes."

"Can we look?"

"No. Lunch break, maybe."

"Must be going well, Joan, or Joe wouldn't even make a guess. Joe, Joan tells me that a rich person can't have friends."

"Hey, wait, I didn't finish. Gigi, a rich person *can* have friends. But it has to be someone who isn't interested in his money. Like you. Like Joe. Even that doesn't mean he's a friend. First you have to find him. Then you have to *know* this about him, which may be—is!—hard to find out. There aren't many such people; even other rich people aren't likely to qualify. Then you have to win his friendship . . . and that's harder for a rich man than it is for other people. A rich man gets suspicious and puts on a false face to strangers—and that's no way to win friends. So in general, it's true—if you're rich you don't have friends. Just acquaintances, kept at arm's length because you've been hurt before."

Gigi suddenly turned around from the kitchen unit. "Joan. We're your friends."

"I hope so." Joan looked soberly from Gigi to her husband. "I felt your love in our Circle. But it won't be easy, Gigi. Joe looks at me and can't help remembering Eunice—and you look at me and can't help wondering what effect it has on Joe."

"We don't! Tell her, Joe."

"Gigi's right," Joe said gently. "Eunice dead. She wanted you to have what you got. Me—over my gut ache, all done in t' Circle." (Boss, do you mind if I get out for a moment and trot around in my bones? A girl likes to be missed a *little*.) (Eunice, we must not hurt him. It was all we could manage to heal him.) (I know. But the next time he kisses us I'm going to be tempted to speak up and tell him I'm here.) (Om Mani Padme Hum.) (Om Mani Padme Hum—and kark on you and Diogenes both. Let's go home and phone Roberto.) (Sweetheart, we'll stay here until we've cracked the bone and eaten the marrow.) (Okay, okay. That Gigi is as cuddly as Winsome, isn't she?)

"Joe, I want us three to be friends and never break our Circle in our hearts. But I'm not going to put too much strain on it. Not fair to you, not fair to Gigi—not even fair to me. Gigi, I wasn't saying I didn't have *any* friends. I do have. You two. A doctor who took care of me and honestly doesn't give a damn about money. The nurse he is about to marry who is the nearest thing to a sister I've ever had. My four driving guards—I've tried very hard with those four, Joe, because I knew they were your friends and Eunice's. But that's an odd situation; I'm more their baby they take care of than I am either employer or friend. And one, just *one*, friend left over from the days when I was Johann Smith—rich and powerful and mostly hated."

Joe Branca said softly, "Eunice loved you."

"I KNOW she did, Joe. God knows why. Except that Eu-



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nice had so much love in her that it spilled over onto anyone around her. If I had been a stray kitten, Eunice would have picked me up and loved me." (More than that, Boss.) (Sweetheart.) "And Joe, you know, or at least have met, my one friend who carried over. Jake Salomon."

Joe nodded. "Jake okay."

"You got to know Jake?"

"Close. Good aura."

Gigi said, "Joe, is he the one you told me about? The fixer?"

"Same." Joe looked back at Joan Eunice. "Ask Jake. Throne, now."

"Come on, Joan. He bites if you don't pose the instant rest period is over."

Joe fussed over getting them back into position, then moved both of Joan's legs and one of Gigi's into positions somewhat different from the original pose—stepped back and scowled at the chance . . . turned to his easel and started scraping part of the canvas with a palette knife. Gigi said quietly, "Now we won't get to look at lunch break."

"Why not?"

"God only knows. I'm not sure Joe knows why he makes a change. But something was wrong and now he's abandoned the cartoon and is working directly from us. So it won't be far enough along that he'll be willing to let us look at it that soon. So freeze, darling. Don't sneeze, don't get an itch, don't even breathe deeply."

"Not talk?"

"Talk all we like as long as we don't move."

"I won't move. Gigi, I was *so* pleased to learn that Joe and Jake got to know each other well. Did you know Jake, too?"

"I've met him. Just in passing. Me leaving and Mr. Salomon arriving—it was while I was a hired model, before I moved out on Big Sam." (Twin, she's being vague about this—and Jake has never mentioned laying eyes on Joe after clearing up business matters a long time ago.) (Eunice, what are you getting at? It was probably while Jake was straightening out your bank account and the lease and things.) ('—and things,' you are so right. Look, Boss, don't be naive. They were crying over the same girl—me—and Joe is ambi as an oyster when it suits him.) (Eunice, you have a dirty mind!) (*Coo*! This from 'No-pants' Smith. I know whereof I speak, twin; I lived with Joe for years. Don't be so darned Twentieth Century.) (Eunice, of course you know Joe better than I do and I would never criticize Joe no matter what. I meant Jake.) (What makes you think you know Jake better than I do? And take a look at Joe—purty, ain't he? Jake has eyes. Boss, what are we fussing about? Find out what Gigi knows.)

"I suppose," Joan said carefully, "that Jake had to come here on business. Eunice died without a will and I know Jake arranged it so that Joe could draw against her bank account. There may have been insurance to clear up, too; I'm not sure."

"Joan, I don't know. Why don't you ask Jake, as Joe suggested?" (Because Jake will lie about it, Boss. Forget it, men lie about



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such things far more than women do. Who cares where a man has lunch as long as he gets home in time for dinner? Not *me*. You give my 'dirty mind' quite enough to keep it busy. But, Boss, you're a devious little slut—you can't be truthful even to yourself.) (Wench, if I could get my hands on you, I'd spank you!) (And if you could, I'd let you. Kind o' fun to be spanked, isn't it, dear? Gets the action moving like a rocket.) (Oh, stuff it!) (Where, twin? What? And how big is it?)

"I have no need to ask Jake, Gigi. I know they met through business matters, I know that Jake admires Joe's integrity. I simply hadn't realized that Jake thought of Joe as a close friend. If he does."

Gigi Branca looked thoughtful. "I couldn't say. I was working Guild hours then, as Joe was paying me. Mr. Salomon—Jake, you call him—showed up one evening as we were quitting, and Joe introduced him to me as his former wife's fixer—lawyer, he said; Joe doesn't use jive when he doesn't want to. Saw him a couple more times, I think, about the same way. But he hasn't been here since we got married." (Double talk, Boss. All it means is that she won't spill other people's secrets. Well, that's nice to know—considering.)

"No importa. Gigi, how did Joe get his art education? Or is it native genius with no instruction?"

"Both, Joan. Let me tell it bang, as it would take you forever to get it out of Joe. Joe says that all an artist can teach is technique. He says creativity can't be taught and that each artist has his own sort. If he has any—Joe thinks that most people who call themselves artists haven't any. He calls 'em sign painters and adds that he would rather be a *good* sign painter than a fraud who calls himself an artist.

"You've seen what Joe has. That one of me he did yesterday and others around the studio. You'd see lots more if you prowled the coffee shops and bookstores and art shops at this end of town. Nudes that look better than life—you wouldn't need to look for his pinxit. Most of them kind a' square except that they grab. Oh, Joe can do sex pix, I've seen him prove it, then scrape off the paint—because I asked him *why* he didn't do sex pix since they sell so well. He shrugged and said those weren't his symbols.

"Joe knows he's not Goya or Picasso or Rembrant or any of the masters—and doesn't want to be; he just wants to paint *his* symbols, *his* way, and sell enough for us to eat. Oh, sometimes I get so *mad*, knowing that if he would paint just *one* frimp scene as grabby as he so easily can, it would keep us eating for months. But I've given up suggesting it because Joe just shrugs and says 'Don' paint comic books, you know that, Gigi.' Joe is Joe and doesn't give a damn what any other artist does or whether his own work makes him famous or a lot of money or anything. He cares so little—well, many of our friends are artists or call themselves artists but Joe isn't interested in what they paint and won't talk shop. If they're



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good people, warm people, good vibes, Joe likes to go see them or have them here . . . but Joe wouldn't waste a floor cushion on Rembrandt if Joe didn't like the way he behaved. Joe just wants to paint—his way. And not to have to sleep alone."

JOAN said thoughtfully, "I don't suppose Joe has had to sleep alone very often."

"Probably not. But Joe wouldn't sleep with Helen of Troy if he didn't like her attitude. You mentioned your Brink's boys—the two who brought you here, and there are two more, aren't there? One a big soul? Hugo?"

"You know Hugo?" Joan asked in delight.

"Never met him. He sounds like an African myth. I know just two things about him. Joe wants to paint him . . . and Joe loves him.

"Spiritual love, I mean—although I'm sure Joe would sack in with Hugo if Hugo wanted to." (He'll have to stand in line! I saw Hugo first.) (Shut up, you bangtail.) "Can never happen, I gather—and Joe never makes a pass. Never made one at me, I never made one at him; we just sacked in our first time without a word and combined as naturally as ham and eggs." (Hmm! Some girls have all the luck. *I* had to trip him.) (You're the eager type, sweetheart; Gigi isn't.) (You'll pay for that crack, Boss.)

"I'm sure Joe never crowded Hugo about posing; he would rather have Hugo's friendship than have him as a model—though Joe told me he has two pix in mind. One would show Hugo on an auction block. Historical background and honkie ladies in the crowd—close shot, full figure, Hugo looking patient and weary, and just heads and shoulders of the honks . . . and the honk females just barely not slobbering.

"But Joe says he *can't* paint that one; it would stir up trouble. The second he really aches to paint—just Hugo, big as a mountain and no sex symbols at all—except that a big stud can't help being sexy, *I* think—just Hugo, strong and wise and solemn dignity—and loving. Joe's words, pieced together by me. Joe wants to paint it and call it *Jehovah*."

"Gigi! Maybe I can help."

"Huh? You can't just tell Hugo to pose for Joe; Joe wouldn't like that. Wouldn't hold still for it."

"Dear, I'm not foolish. But maybe I can make Hugo see that it's all right to pose for Joe. Can't hurt to try." (Boss, let Hugo know that you have been posing naked for Joe. Then let it soak.) (Of course, Eunice, but that's just the gambit.) (Twin! You're not thinking of trying to *seduce* Hugo, are you? Damn it, I won't stand for it! You leave Father Hugo alone.) (Eunice, I'm not *that* much of a fool. Hugo can have anything I've got; he killed the creep who killed you. But I would never offer what he won't accept. If I did, I think he'd quit—and then pray for me. I vote with Joe; I'll take Hugo as he is; never try to twist his arm.) (You couldn't. His arms are bigger than our thighs.) (I meant psychologically, twin, and you know it.)



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"Just one thing, Gigi—Joe would have to give up that title for the pic."

"You don't know Joe, Joan. He won't change the title."

"Then he'll have to carry it just in his mind. Hugo is as firm in *his* rules as Joe is in his. He won't let a picture of himself be titled *Jehovah*. It would be sacrilege in his eyes. But if Joe is willing to keep the title a secret, I think I can deliver the body. You talk to Joe. But you never did tell me where Joe got his training."

"Oh. Joe could always draw; I'm sure he could have learned to read, he remembers what he sees. When he was about fourteen, he was being held overnight with some other boys in the precinct lockup and the desk sergeant got a look at some sketches Joe had done while he was killing time, waiting to be taken up in front of the judge and warned. One was of the desk sergeant—and Joe had seen him only a few minutes.

"That was Joe's break. The desk sergeant turned him over to the priest and got him off the blotter and both of them took him to a local artist and showed him the kid's sketches.

"This artist was a mixture, fine art and commercial—I mean he made money. He was another sort of mixture, too. An oyster. He may not have been impressed by Joe's sketches but he made a deal with him. Modeling. Joe could hang around his studio and use his materials and sketch from his models—if Joe would pose when he needed him. They both won on the deal; you know how Joe looks now; at fourteen I'd bet he was more beautiful than any girl—and no doubt that oyster thought so.

"So Joe did and soon he was eating and sleeping there and got away from his mother entirely, best thing that ever happened to him. Joan, it was a one-bed studio like this one."

"You mean Joe was his sweetheart? Gigi, I decline to be shocked. Even though I'm ninety-five, I try to think modern."

"Joan, I never can believe that's your age; it isn't real, like that million dollars. I said 'oyster' not 'homo.' The artist was married, or shacked, with his number-one model. Possibly she got Joe's cherry. Either way, she taught him plenty and mothered him and was good to him, and it was a happy Troy.

"But the artist—Mr. Tony, as Joe speaks of him—while he gave Joe the use of his studio and table and bed and wife—was nevertheless a strict master. He wouldn't let Joe paint with a palette knife or a wide broom or do distortions or abstracts or psychedelics—he made him learn to draw. Anatomy. Composition. Brush techniques. Color values. The whole endless drill of academic art, and wash brushes and sweep out the studio. Joe says that if it hadn't been for Mr. Tony, he would still be sketching sausage skins. Joe found out what he could do, what he wanted to do, and learned to do it. But, so he told me, not what his master did—but in both cases founded on old-fashioned academic training. The hard way. Oh, Joe's learned short cuts. But he can paint directly on canvas—he's



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been doing it since our last break —and make it as close to a photograph as he cares to. Or as different."

"—never said that poor is better than rich, Gigi; it is *not*. But both rich and poor have shortcomings—somewhere between is probably best, if you could get off the treadmill at that point. But— Look, does Joe guard you when you go grocery-shopping?"

"Huh? Of course not. Oh, sometimes he comes along and helps carry—but not to guard. Well, he does ride down the lift with me if it's a time of day when it might be empty—I mean, he's no fool and neither am I and I don't go *looking* for a mugging. Same coming back up and if I'm later than I said I would be, he's always there waiting. But I move around by myself, always have; I'm just not foolish about where and when."

"Gigi, I'm sure you're not foolish, I doubt if you ever go into a park—"

"Not even at high noon! I've been raped once and didn't like it. I'm not looking for a gang bang where they take turns holding you down. They ought to bulldoze every park in the city."

"Bulldozing the whole city might be better. But, Gigi, you move around rather freely. I *can't*. I don't dare appear even with guards around me without being veiled, I can't risk being recognized. I have to be wary all the time. Sure, you bolt your door—but *my* house has to be strong enough to take a bomb tossed against it—that's happened several times since I built it. I have to watch for everything from kidnapers and assassins to mere nuisances who want to touch me.

"I'm talking both about the way I am now and the man 'Johann' I used to be—too much money attracts crackpots and criminals and there is *nothing* I can do about it but keep guards around me day and night, live in a house that's a fort, try to avoid being recognized at *any* time and never, never try to live what is called a normal life. Besides that— Gigi, can you imagine what a treat it is to me to be allowed to wash dishes?"

Gigi looked startled. "Huh? Joan, you've lost me. Oh, I know how complicated it is to be rich; I've watched video. But washing dishes isn't a treat; it's a horrid bore. Too often I've left them in the sink, then had to face them before breakfast. By the time breakfast is ready, I don't want any."

"Let me give you a tip, Gigi. I did know something about Joe's mother; Eunice was my secretary for years." (I never mentioned her, Boss!) (Will you let me tell this lie my own way?) "She was—and is—a pig and lives like one. This place isn't big; if you'll keep it spotless Joe won't care when you get wrinkles—and we all do some day. But a dirty toilet bowl or dishes in the sink reminds him of his mother."

Gigi said, "Joan, I *try*. But I can't clean house and pose at the same time."

"Do your best, hon. If necessary, lose sleep. Joe is a man worth making extra effort to keep.



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But I was talking about doing dishes—it's a nuisance to you but a luxury to me. Washing dishes means 'freedom' to me. Look, here we are, three of us, no servants—and presently I'll be gone and you'll be alone with your husband and the world shut out. I *can't* shut it out. Uh . . . let me think— Four mobile guards, a security chief, twelve in-house watchmen under him, three always on duty and the others on call, which means the married ones—which is most of them—have their families under my roof—a personal maid, a valet who used to tend me and now takes care of guests—couldn't fire him; I *never* fire anyone without cause—a butler, a head chef, three—oh, I don't remember; there were about sixty adults in my house the last time I asked."

"My God, Joan!"

"Yes, 'My God!' To take care of *one* person. Yet not one could I let go without replacing him. I planned that house and kept tabs on the design, intending to keep staff down to a minimum. So it's loaded with gadgets. Things like robofootmen and a trick bed that was designed to let me get along without a nurse a few more years as I got older. Do you know what that means? I *lost*. I have to have a building superintendent and maintenance mechanics—or the gadgets don't work. All this complication—and never any real privacy—just to take care of one person who doesn't want it that way."

"Joan, why don't you get rid of it? Move—and start over."

"Move *where*, dear? Oh, I've thought about it, believe me. But it's not actually to take care of one person—it's to take care of too much money, money that is fastened to me . . . so that I can't risk kidnapers or anything else. I can't even cash it and flush it down the pot; that's not the way big money works. And even if I could and did—nobody would believe I had. I would just have taken off my armor and probably would not stay alive two days. Besides— Do you like cats?"

"Love 'em! Got a kitten promised now."

"Good. Now tell me—how do you get rid of a cat you've raised?"

"Huh? Why, you don't. Not if you're decent."

"I agree, Gigi. I've lived with many cats. You keep them. If you are forced to it, you have a cat humanly destroyed—or if you have the guts, you kill it yourself so that it won't be bungled. But you *don't* give away a grown cat; it is almost impossible. But, Gigi, you can't kill people."

"I don't understand, Joan."

"What would I do with Hugo? He's been with me many years; he's doing the only thing he knows how to do—except preach, which doesn't really pay. Gigi, loyal servants are Chinese obligations, just like a cat. Sure, they can get other jobs. But what would you do if Joe told you, 'Get lost. We're finished."

"I'd cry."

"I don't think my servants would cry—but I would."

"But I'd get along!"

Joan sighed. "And that platoon I have around me would get along,



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I think; they're able or I wouldn't have them—and I've got money to make sure that ones like Hugo are taken care of; that's one of the *good* things about being rich—if money is all it takes to remedy something, you can. Gigi, there is some solution to this silly fix I'm in and I'm going to find it—I was just trying to show you that it isn't as simple as it looks on video. The solution may be something as easy as changing my name again and changing my face with plastic surgery and going somewhere else."

"Oh, no, you mustn't change your face."

"No, you're right; I must not change this face. It's Eunice's; I'm only its custodian. If I changed it, Joe would not like it—nor several other people. (Starting with *me*, Boss.) (I won't change your lovely face, sweetheart. I'll cherish it.) "I'll keep it as it is—but I have to keep it veiled. It's been on video too much, photographed and printed too many million times. But there's *some* way to tackle the problem."

JOAN EUNICE looked at the nearly finished painting almost with awe. She knew what a beautiful body she had inherited; she knew that Gigi was a beauty of another sort; she could see that these "Grecian damsels" were herself and Gigi and she could not see any detail in which the painting was not a perfect likeness of each.

Yet Joe Branca's "realism" was fantasy. These two nymphs in a glade were voluptous, sensuous, enticing in a way that she *knew* she and Gigi had not been—sprawled on a platform of boards and gossiping about everything from an alcoholic to dirty dishes.

"What do you think?" Gigi asked. "Say what you like; Joe doesn't give a hoot about any opinion but his own."

Joan took a deep breath, sighed. "How does he do it? Here I am with my nipples tight just from looking at it—and yet it's you and me, and we lay there talking for *hours* and never got in a sweat about it. Discussed everything but Topic 'A'—wasn't even a cuddle because we had to hold still. Yet this paint-and-canvas reaches out and grabs you by the gonads and *squeezes*. I'm certain it would have just as much effect on a man."

From behind them Joe said, "Fool-the-eye."

Joan answered, "Fool-the-eye, hell, Joe. My eyes are not fooled, I'm enchanted. I want to buy it!"

"No."

"Huh? Oh, kark. You planned to sell it to some old butch. God knows ninety-five is old—and I feel butch enough to qualify when I look at the painting."

"Yours."

"Huh? Joe, you can't do this to me. You intended to sell it, you said so. Gigi, back me up."

Gigi chose not to answer. Joe said stubbornly, "Yours, Joan. You want it, you take it."

"Joe, you are the most stubborn man I've ever met and I don't see how Gigi puts up with you. If you



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*give* me that painting, I'm going to destroy it at once—"

Gigi gasped. "Oh, no!"

Joe shrugged. "Your ache. Not mine."

"—but if you'll *sell* it to me at your going rates, I'll take it with me and give it to Jake Salomon to hang at the end of his bed so he'll wake up happy each morning." (You bombed him, twin! Now swing back and strafe the survivors.) "That's the choice, Joe. Give it to me and I'll chop it into shreds. But sell it to me—and Jake Salomon gets it. Oh, you could welch, then hang it for sale—and put me to the trouble of hiring detectives to follow it to where you hang it so that I can buy it through an agent. What I do with it then, I won't tell. Or you could even keep it for your own jollies; it's quite a job."

Gigi said, "Quit being stubborn, Joe; you know you'd like Jake to have it."

"Gigi, what does Joe charge for a painting like that?"

"Oh, I set the prices. Mostly I sell them by the yard. By size."

"So? How much is this size?"

"Well, I try to get two hundred and fifty for that size."

"Ridiculous!"

"Really, Joan, considering that it took both my time and Joe's all yesterday evening and today—not to mention your time, but you're buying it, so I didn't add on for the second figure in it—considering all that and the commission we pay, it's not very much—"

"Darling, I meant 'ridiculously' *low*. I haven't bought much art the last twenty years but I do know that is not less than a thousand-dollar picture—then up like a kite to whatever the traffic will bear. I can tell you this: When Jake dies and that painting is auctioned off, it won't go for as little as a thousand . . . and it might be much higher because I'm certain to be at that auction and in no mood to let it get out of the family. But I'm not raising the price now; I never do that. You named a price of two-fifty; I accept."

"Joan, you never did let *me* finish."

"Oh. Sorry, hon."

"I try to get two hundred and fifty for that size when I hang it in a shop. But half of that goes to the owner of the shop; that's the only way I can get space. So the price to you is a hundred and twenty-five."

"No."

"Why not?"

"Just 'No' the way Joe said it to me. As good business practice you should *never* undercut your retailer. I think he's robbing you; the commission should be twenty-five percent, no more. But don't undercut the price you want *him* to ask—that's no way to stay in business. I don't know much about art . . . but I know one hell of a lot about business. Cash, or check?"

"Cash is fine. If you have that much with you. Or pay when you feel like it."

"I want to pay now and get a receipt so that it will be legally mine—before your stubborn husband can thwart me again. Shall I write the receipt for you, Gigi girl?"



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"Oh, I've got Woolworth's printed forms for that, and I can write numbers and sign my chop. No huhu."

"Good. But I want something else."

"What, Joan?"

"I want to be kissed. I've been a good girl and posed all day and haven't even been kissed for it. So I want Joe to kiss me for being so stinky difficult—and I want to kiss you for helping me with him. Joe, will you kiss me?"

"Yes."

"That's better. Joe, will you escort two nice girls—me and Gigi, I mean, and no smart cracks—down to the supermarket? If Gigi will buy us a steak to celebrate, I want to prove I can broil it. Will you buy us a steak, Gigi?"

"Sure! Beef, or horse?"

"Uh . . . hon, I'm forced to admit that I haven't shopped for groceries in years. What do you think?"

"Well . . . it had better be horse."

"Whatever you say. As long as they don't sell us the harness."

## XXV

IN THE United Nations the Burmese delegation charged that the so-called Lunar Colonies were a coverup for a conspiracy by China and the United States to build military bases on the Moon. The Secretary of Conservation and Pollution Control denied a report that deer in Yosemite National Park were "dying in hordes from polluted water and emphysema." He stated that a healthy ecological rebalancing was taking place—no need for alarm—and the new herd would be stronger than ever.

The Reverend Dr. Montgomery Chang, D.D., Most Humble Supreme Leader of The Way, Inc., testified before the subcommittee on Unwritten Law of the Senate Judiciary Committee in support of the pending bill to require Federal licensing of teachers of Zen Buddhism and related disciplines as "therapists *de facto et de jure*: These bootleg gurus are giving rational mysticism a bad name. A man should no more be allowed to teach meditation, asanas, or transcendental philosophy without strict control by a licensing board than he should be allowed to ski or to surf or to frame a picture without passing an examination. The idea that this bill would abridge the sacred guarantees of the First Amendment is the sheerest nonsense; it protects and frees them." Under questioning he stated that he would be humbly willing to serve as chairman of such a board if such sacrifice were asked of him. Survivors of Hurricane Hilda were still being rescued and the known death toll now stood at 1908.

The Department of Internal Defense placed a temporary exception on interstate transmittal of intelligence concerning public disorders involving more than three persons, then placed a second exception with strict penalties on the publicizing of the first censorship order. The Secretary reported to the President that news services and video nets were cooperating voluntarily in the interests of the general



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welfare. In re the matter of identity of Conglom Tycoon Johann S. B. Smith the Supreme Court in a declaratory relief opinion made notable only by Mr. Justice Handy waking up in the middle of its reading, slapping the desk and roaring, "Divorce granted!" then going back to sleep, ruled seven to two to sustain a lower court in expanding and clarifying the principle originally set forth in *Estate of Henry M. Parsons vs Rhode Island*. Four of the majority and one dissenting justice ruled also that a legal sex change was involved in the matter; two justices thought otherwise, one justice (Mr. Handy) used twenty pages to prove that such a composite of sexes was contrary to public interest and to the laws of God and that both Johann Smith and Eunice Branca were legally dead and that the resultant monster had no legal existence of any sort; the ninth justice, in a one-sentence separate assent, opined that sex was irrelevant in the entire matter; one of the majority, in another separate assenting opinion, stated that the donor body should have been sterilized surgically in the public interest and that the Congress would do well to make such sterilization mandatory in any future similar situation. No mention was made by any justice of thirteen *amici-curiae* briefs and one petition filed with the Court. In an opinion issued the same day (*Illinois vs Sam J. Roberts*) conviction was set aside on the grounds that the householder (deceased) had not advised Roberts of his rights before attempting to place him under citizen's arrest.

**A Bluebird Special.** HEAVEN NOW! Couple seeks couple to share safe house & loving friendship 3 br, 2 bths, MercServ, all util, nr lic pvt schl, *atrium garden*. Cmptr types (Rankin program) ♂ 690047, ♀ 890047—any 85%-plus match considered. "One for All, All for One!" No deposit but please send stereopix with notarized Rankin Reports—bx 69 Bluebird, Ltd.

On the basis of evidence submitted by the Chinese delegation the UN AEC eased the tolerance levels for strontium-90 for whole milk. The Reverend Thomas Barker of Long Beach, California, in an Equal-Time-for-God videosermonette declared that the World had ended at midnight December 31st 1999 PCT, and that all since that time was "illusion of the Devil, without form, substance, or reality."

MISS SMITH greeted O'Neil and asked him to have Dabrowski and Fred fetch upstairs with her two big flat packages, one so large that it had to be tilted to get it through the door of the lift. When packages, mobile guards and she herself were fitted inside she locked the door and pressed the "Hold" touchplate without signaling a floor, then dropped her cape. "Let me kiss you thank-you-goodnight, boys, but for heaven's sake don't get paint on you or muss it. Better just hold my face in your hands—but no need to hurry."

Shortly thereafter she looked at herself in the lift's mirror, decided that makeup and hair-do had suf-



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fered only minor wear and tear, let Dabrowski lay her cape around her, then punched for her floor and fastened all the cape's frogs so that she was again fully covered. When the lift stopped she hooked up her veil.

"These go in your boudoir, Miss? Or your lounge?"

"First let's see if Mr. Salomon is receiving." They followed her down the long hall to the Green Suite. Joan noted that the please-don't-disturb ruby light was not burning over the door of Jake's lounge, so she touched the door signal.

The speaker above it bellowed, "Come in!" The door opened; she went in. "Put them inside and that will be all."

"Very good, Miss."

As they left and the door closed Jake came out of his bedroom, looking tousled. He stopped abruptly. "Well! Where the hell have you been?"

"Out."

"Hrrrmph! Five days. Five *whole* days!"

"So? Chickens fed? Hogs slopped? Cows milked?"

"That's not the point. I—"

"That *is* the point, Jake. Nothing has been neglected through my being away. You won't marry me, so I am not answerable to you when I come and go. Though as a courtesy I *did* leave a note with Cunningham telling you where I had gone. Did you receive it?"

"Yes, but—"

"Then you knew I was safe—and in emergency could have sent me a message. Or joined me; you would have been welcome. You *know* Joe would have made you welcome—and Gigi is friendly as a puppy."

"Gigi?"

"You know her. You've met her, I mean. Mrs. Joe Branca."

"*What*?"

"Why the surprise, Jake? People do remarry—especially if an earlier marriage was happy. Joe's was and now he has—and I'm happy for him—and certain that Eunice is happy for him, too." (Sure I am, Boss. But let's not be too noble. Being noble is a male prerogative. So *they* think.)

"I can't believe it."

"What's odd about a widower remarrying?"

"I can't imagine anyone who had been married to Eunice ever marrying some other woman." (My fan! Twin, we're going to be especially nice to Jake tonight.) (If he doesn't start being nice to *me*, he's going to sleep alone tonight! But *I* shan't. I wonder if Anton and Fred have left the house?) (Calm down, Boss. And get Jake calmed down.) (Not yet, I won't! He's wrong and I'm right.) (Twin, honey, how long is it going to take you to learn that being right has nothing to do with getting along with a man? Men aren't logical, their minds don't work that way. But it's the only game in town, so when a man is wrong and you are right, it's time to apologize. Tell him you're sorry—and *mean* it. Om Mani Padme Hum.)

(Om Mani Padme Hum—sometimes I find being a woman just too frimping difficult. If it weren't so darned much fun. Okay, sweetheart, watch me take him.) "Jake



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dearest, I'm sorry it upsets you that Joe has remarried—but why not wait before deciding that he has made a mistake? Joe *needs* a wife—even if she's not Eunice. And I'm terribly sorry that I worried you by not being here when you got home . . . and sorry on my own account; I expected to welcome you—with open arms and a happy smile. But I didn't expect you to be away less than a week and I had an impression that you expected it to take longer—possibly much longer."

"Well, yes, I did think I might have to sit it out quite a while. But I got in to see the Chief Justice the second day and he assured me that he would put it at the top of the calendar . . . and that he had seen—unofficially—an advance transcript of the record. And that was that."

"Hm! Campaign contributions are sometimes worth while."

"Joan Eunice, don't *ever* talk that way. Especially in reference to the Chief Justice of the United States. Yes, this is your house. Nevertheless it might be bugged."

"I'm sorry, Jake. It was a thoughtless remark. My appreciation really goes where it belongs. To *you*."

"To Mac more than to me, my dear; that boy has been on the ball. How he got an advance copy to, uh, the right man so quickly is something I don't want to inquire into."

"I appreciate Mac's efforts, I appreciate Alec's efforts—but mostly I appreciate my darling, always dependable, utterly wonderful Jake." (Is that too thick, Eunice?) (Boss, I keep telling you: it's *impossible* for a woman to lay it on too thick with a man. If you tell a man he's eight feet tall and say it often enough, with your eyes wide and a throb in your voice, he'll start stooping to go through seven-foot doors.)

Jake looked pleased, so Joan went on: "I suppose it will all be settled soon, then?"

"Little one, don't you ever listen to the news?"

"Not if I can avoid it."

"Well, you should. It *is* over. You've won, finally and completely."

"Really? I never doubted that we would win, Jake, the wonderful way you've handled everything. My surprise is solely that it has happened so fast. Yes, I suppose I should follow the news. But I haven't been able to, these last few days. Had this difficult job to do—Joe, I mean—and while you were away seemed the best time . . . so I gritted my teeth and tackled it."

"Joan Eunice, I told you never to go near Joe. I *told* you. If this new marriage of his ever stood a chance—yes, intellectually I know that a man should remarry—if it ever *did* stand a chance, you must have put a horrible strain on it. Too much strain, probably. Uh . . . how did he take it? Badly?"

"Jake, I stayed five days. If it had gone badly, would I have been there even *one* day? I accomplished the mission; everything is all right."

Jake looked surprised, then thoughtful. "Hmm! That's a one-room studio . . . and if I follow your meaning, you stayed right



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there the whole five days. My dear, just *how* did you 'accomplish your mission?' Or have I no right to ask?"

She looked up at him and spoke seriously. "Jake, I owe you so much that you will always have the right to ask me anything. Including my comings and goings and I should not have given you a snippy answer." (Didn't quite tell him he had a right to a *truthful* answer, did you, Boss honey? Devious little bitch.) (Eunice, I don't lie to Jake—) (Oh, what a *whopper*!) (—more than is necessary to his happiness.)

"Jake, I accomplished my mission—I set Joe's mind at rest about Eunice—through a 'prayer meeting.' With Gigi's utterly necessary help, which is only part of why I feel sure that she's good for him. But if you mean I offered him a zombie—his dead wife's re-animated body—I knew that was not the way to do it. Joe hasn't touched me. Oh, he does touch me now, easily and without strain, the way he might touch his sister." (Any incest in Joe's family, twin? I've never been sure.) (Oh, shut up!) "He even kisses me the same way. But, Jake—"

"Eh? What, dear?"

"If Joe *wanted* this body I'm wearing, of *course* he could have it; I owe him anything I can give him. You see that, don't you? You agree? Or am I wrong?"

"Uh . . . yes, I agree. But I think it's well that Joe does not want to. It could be disaster for him . . . and a terrible strain for you."

"I know it would be a strain for me. But I would do my best to smile and never let him guess. As it is, I am honored—and relieved—and deeply grateful that Joe has given me his loving friendship instead." (Okay, Eunice?) (Okay. Now get him off that subject.)

"I'm glad, Eunice."

"Jake, do we have to stand here, me still in street clothes? I have presents for you—welcome-home presents." She smiled her best happy-little-girl smile. "Want to see them?"

"Of course I want to see them! And where are my manners, letting you stand? Here, let me seat you and take your cloak. Sherry?"

"Later. Or champagne, to welcome you home. To welcome us both home." She turned and let him take her cape. He turned to lay it aside and turned back just as she did so, too.

"Holy *cow*!"

"Didn't know you were a Hindu, Jake." She posed, in graceful and calculated display.

"You wore *that* all the way across the city? Just paint?"

"WHY not, dear? It's your first present—from Joe to you, sent with his love. I had my cape over it before I left Joe's studio and kept it on when I got home—until you unwrapped your present. Didn't want my mobiles to see it, of course." (Oh, of *course*, twin—except that Joe let them watch every brush stroke, once Gigi was sure you didn't mind. Say, Joan, Gigi would go for a Texas Star with Anton and Fred, I feel certain. And Joe would go along; he likes them. What do you think?



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Easy way to keep your promise to them, huh?)

(Eunice, we've got *this* man on our hands now.) (Oh, poor you. Best way in the world to work up steam with *one* man is to let your mind rove about *other* men. You've still got some Puritan in you, girl.) (Which Puritan? When? And why didn't I notice? You can't mean Jake; he's Jewish. Speaking of Jake, has he noticed that slight omission in this getup? And why haven't we been raped?) (I doubt it, his eyeballs are spinning. As for the latter, I have hopes.)

"Joan Eunice, do you realize that that is a reproduction—exact, I think—of a body-paint design Eunice once wore?"

"Of course I realize it; she wore it *here*... and I wasn't so near dead that I didn't stare. Could never make up my mind whether these were sea shells, or paint. Now I know. Joe wanted to be sure that you had seen it that first time, when Eunice wore it. I told him that I was almost certain that you had been here that day."

"Well, yes, I was. Briefly. That's why I recognized it."

"So? It had seemed to me that I recalled that as one of the days you took Eunice home. Hmmm?"

"Joan, are you trying to be snoopy?"

"Yes."

"Woman, I will not satisfy your prurient curiosity."

"How do you feel about satisfying prurience itself? Mine, I mean."

"That's another matter."

"I was wondering. So far you haven't even kissed me. Shall I take a shower first? Or let me put it this way: Did Eunice take time to get the paint off first?"

"Let *me* put it *this* way: Shut up and keep quiet and pipe down and not another damn' word out of you until I give permission."

"Yes, sir."

She obeyed in essence for a reasonable time.

"May I talk now?"

"Yes, as long as you limit yourself to polite words of endearment. Some of your spontaneous remarks were quite unladylike."

"That's because I'm quite unladylike, Jake my only darling. I'm a failure as a lady. But I'll go on doing my best to simulate one in public—be a credit to Eunice."

"Joan Eunice—"

"Sir?"

"That's the way Eunice herself did it. A perfect lady in public... utterly uninhibited in private. It was a major part of her great charm. Some of *her* spontaneous expressions at such times were far more unladylike than any I've heard you use."

"Really, Jake? Did she know any that I don't? And do you like them?"

"Mmm, I don't think she knew any that you don't know; she was just easier about it once she trusted me. Yes, I do like them. Used spontaneously."

"Jake, I trust you without limit—and I'll try not to inhibit any future spontaneity. Haven't meant to. Still learning."

"Darling girl, you do just fine when you get your rest. I mean my rest. Now that I've got you helpless—and seeing that you trust me



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without limit—what *did* happen at Joe's?"

"Sir, the fact that I trust you—and I do—does not mean that I'm going to satisfy your prurient curiosity."

"Hmm— Neither did Eunice, ever."

"Instead, you tell me what happened to *you*—at Joe's."

"We seem to have reached a stalemate. Let's wash off this paint. I wish I had taken a photograph of our mermaid before I smeared it."

"No huhu, Jake my beloved; Joe took several and I have them in my purse. For you. And I have two of Eunice in the same getup—one for you, and one for *me*. And besides that Joe gave me a four-by-five Kodachrome of a most incredible *trompe-l'oeil* painting he did of Eunice as a mermaid diving ... plus a smaller transparency which shows how he did it. Same getup minus sea shells."

"Would it surprise you to learn that I've seen them both? Just didn't have the crust to promote Joe for them."

"No, not surprised, I guess. But I did *not* pressure him, Jake; he said he had a present for me—and these photos turned out to be the present. I should refuse? God forbid. But I'm going to put snoops to work and trace down who bought that painting. I intend to own it. Price no object."

"Your money won't help you, Miss Smith. Would it surprise you to know that *I* own that original Branca? It's at the Gib."

"I'll be—dipped! Jake, you're a dirty old holdout. I take back ten percent of any compliments I've handed you."

"That's okay; I didn't believe more than ninety percent. But if you're a good girl I'll *give* you that painting."

"I accept! But—well, it's hardly worth while opening those packages. They'll be disappointments."

"Would you like a spanking?"

"Yes."

"I'm too tired. Let's open packages."

"Well ... we might open the smaller one. Let you see what Gigi looks like, if you don't remember. She's worth looking at."

"We'll open both of them."

"Scrub first?"

"I suppose we should."

"Well ... let's give it a lick and promise, not turn it into a social event."

JOAN EUNICE insisted on opening *Bilitis Sings* first. "Well, Jake?"

He gave a respectful wolf whistle. "The boy's a genius."

"Yes. I hadn't suspected. But you already knew it."

"Well, yes. His decision to use strong sunlight on your two contrasting skin colors was inspired."

"Especially as he had no sunlight—just smog-filtered north light, soft as old linen. Those highlights come from photographing us under floods the night before. Then he painted from us the next day. Changed the pose, though—and I don't know just how he corrected the highlights. But I'm no genius."

"What's in the big package?"

"Open it."



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It was *The Three Graces*—and all three were Joan Eunice. "Joe calls this a 'cheat pic,' Jake—he photographed me three times—erase and correct—more nearly thirty-three times, against a neutral background, . then combined three photos for his cartoon. Had Gigi pose with me each time to get arms-around-waist and so forth, then she would slither out like a snake without disturbing my pose. If he hadn't used 'cheat' the painting would have taken far longer. Aren't those dimples in my behind cute?"

"Woman, you are conceited enough."

"I'm not conceited, Jake; I wasn't handsome even when I was young. I know whose beautiful bottom that is. Well, dear? I had intended *Bilitis* for me and the *Graces* for you—but you can have your choice."

"What a choice to have to make!"

"The one you let me keep will be no farther away than down the hall. If you had married me when you so obviously should have, you lecherous old rapist, you wouldn't have to make a choice; both would be yours. Jake, what does it cost to buy a job lot of art critics?"

"Well, the present crop ought not to fetch more than ten cents a dozen but everything is higher these days. I take it you have Joe Branca in mind?"

"Of course. He's selling his paintings at ridiculously low prices and paying outrageous commission—and sells so few that the kids hardly get enough to eat. While freaks and frauds and sign painters are all the rage. I thought—"

"You can stop thinking; I see the swindle. We'll get him a good agent, we'll buy up what he has on the market, using dummies—and keep them ourselves; they're a sure-fire investment . . . and we'll buy art critics here, then elsewhere as he becomes better known. The question is: How much of a success must he be? Do I have to get him into the Metropolitan?"

"Jake, I don't think Joe *wants* to be famous. And *I* don't want it to be so conspicuous that he might smell a rat. Or that Gigi might; she's a little more sophisticated. Not very, that is. I just want his pictures to sell regularly enough that Gigi can buy groceries without worrying and can have enough disposable sheets that she can change them every day if it suits her. The kid is trying to keep house on scraped icebox and boiled dishrag soup. I tried that in the Depression and it's not funny—and I see no reason why Gigi should have to do it when she's married to an honest-to-God artist who can *paint*—and works at it. One who doesn't spend his time sopping up sauce or blowing weed and talking about the painting he's going to do. Joe paints. He's a craftsman as well as an artist. Well, maybe I don't know what an artist is but I know what a craftsman is and I respect craftsmen. Too few of them in this decadent world."

"No argument. We'll do it. Even if we have to go as high as fifteen cents a dozen."

"Even two-bits. Let's finish getting paint off—I must send down



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for olive oil—and you could be a darling and get Winnie to fetch me a heavy robe or get it yourself, pretty please, if she isn't home—no, I can get back to my room in my street cape, no problem, and—"

"Hrrrmph."

"Did I goof again?"

"My dear, I have an announcement. Dr. and Mrs. Roberto Carlos Garcia y Ibañez are on their honeymoon."

"*What*? Why, the dirty little rat! Didn't wait for big sister to hold her hand. Good for them! Jake, that's *wonderful*—I think I'll cry."

"Go ahead, you cry while I shower."

"Hell, no, I'll cry when Winnie is back. I'll take that shower with you and you can scrub me. My back, where I can't see the paint; not my front, I'm tired, too. When was it and do you know when they will be home? And, goodness, I must pick out a suite for them; Roberto won't want to be next to mine with a connecting door. And I need to think of a wedding present—I may give them the painting you don't pick; Roberto won't let me give them anything expensive, he's a stubborn man." (Boss, is there another sort?)

"I can't see why Bob wouldn't want to have a connecting door into your bedroom."

"I think that was meant to be an insult. Perhaps he would like it, dear—*I* would like it. But it would not look right to the servants." (Frimp the servants!) (*All* of them, Eunice? I'm kept busy as it is.)

"Eunice, I took the liberty of telling Cunningham to have the Gold Suite set up for the Garcias—"

"Perfect! I'll have a door cut from my lounge into theirs . . . and there already is a lock-off that we can unlock between its foyer and the upstairs library we joined to your suite—and then we can quit this unseemly ducking back and forth through the hall."

"The newlyweds *might* prefer to be left alone."

"Hadn't thought of that. Oh, well, 'I have some friends of my own,' as the old gal said."

"In any case they'll be back too soon for carpentry. I have it from a usually dependable source that a reliably dishonest member of your staff agreed to phone Mrs. Garcia the instant you returned. I assume that the call was made, I assume that they will be back by, oh, nightfall."

"I wonder whom I should fire? That's a hell of a way to run a honeymoon."

"I understand the good Doctor was in on it—the idea being to keep you safe from harm, since between them they constitute your medical staff."

"What nonsense. I'm the Pioneer-Mother type. Rugged. If I had crossed with the prairie schooners, they would have yoked me in with the oxen. But I'm glad they're coming home. I want to kiss them and cry on them."

"Johann, sometimes I can't make up my mind whether you are a silly young girl—or senile."

"The last time you called me Johann you acquired some scar tissue. Dear, has it occurred to



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you that I might be both? A senile silly young girl?"

"Interesting. A possible working hypothesis."

"If so, I'm a well adjusted one—Jake, I'm a happy as a cat left alone with the Christmas turkey. With Joe squared away and the Supreme Court being sensible for a change my last fret is gone. Life is one long giddy delight. I'm even morning sick."

"Can't see why you should be—*huh*?" (Boss, I thought you weren't going to tell him?) (Eunice, he was bound to know soon . . . and I couldn't just let him find out, can't do that to *Jake*. This is the perfect time—he's officially 'first to know.')

"I SAID I wasn't bothered by morning sickness, Jake. I'm healthy as a horse and the only change I've noticed is that I'm hungry as a horse, too."

"You wish me to believe that you are pregnant?"

"Don't give me that stern-father look, Jake. I'm knocked up and happier than Happy Hooligan. I could have kept it to myself a while longer but I wanted to tell you before anyone else could notice. But be a dear and treat it as privileged—because the instant Winnie finds out she'll start mothering me and worrying. Which is not what a bride should be doing. With luck I can keep it from Winnie until she's pregnant, too." (Boss, what makes you think Winnie intends to get pregnant?) (Use your head, Eunice—five to one she's got a Bandaid over the spot where that implant used to be this very minute.) (I don't have a head, Boss—just yours and it doesn't work too well.) (Complaints, huh? Talk that way and I won't marry *you*, either.) (We *are* married, Boss.) (I know it, beloved. Now be quiet; I've got to juggle eggs.)

"Eunice—are you sure?"

"Yes. Test positive."

"Did Bob make the test? Or some quack?"

"A patient's relations with a doctor are confo. But it was not a quack. Don't pursue this line of inquiry, Counselor."

"We'll get married at once."

"The hell we will!"

"Eunice, let's have no nonsense!"

"Sir, I asked you to marry me quite some time back. You emphatically refused. I asked you at a later time. Again I was turned down. I decided not to renew my request and I do not do so now. I will *not* marry you. But I will be honored and delighted to continue as your mistress until I am benched by biology—and more than pleased to be allowed again to be your concubine when I am back in commission. I love you, sir. But I will not marry you."

"I ought to spank you."

"I don't think it would do me any damage, darling. But I don't think you could bring yourself to strike a pregnant woman." (Now kick him in the *other* shin, Boss. You little hellcat.) (Eunice, stay out of this row. I'm not only a woman scorned; I'm also old Johann Smith who never could be pushed too far. Jake can have us any time, sure. But I'm damned if I'll let him be 'noble' about it when



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I'm knocked up.) (Boss, aren't we *ever* going to marry him? This is a mistake, dear; he needs us.) (And we need him, Eunice. Sure, we'll marry him—after we've whelped. *After*.) (Boss, you're making a big mistake.) (If so, I'm making it. I never make little mistakes—just big ones.)

"I didn't say I was going to spank you, Eunice—I said I ought to. What happened? I distinctly remember you telling me that you had taken care of contraception."

"Your memory is good, sir. The exact phrasing, as I phrased it most carefully. I have 'taken care' of such matters in whatever fashion I wished. Every time. With you. With others. Each time I have taken such care as suited me—at that time and with that man."

"Hmmm! That's as unresponsive an answer as I've ever heard. Let me put it more plainly. Eunice, did I get you pregnant?"

"I won't answer. You know that at least one other man has slept with me—and I may have been the bride of the regiment. Jake, you would not marry me when I was virgin; you still would not marry me when you made me your mistress. So where I got this child in me is not your business and you have no right to quiz me and—much as I love you—I will *not* tolerate one more question along this line. Not now nor in the future! Whom I chose to father my child is *my* business. But you may be certain that I selected him with care, eyes open and wits about me. You've been acting as if you were a father dealing with a wayward daughter, or a Welfare visitor trying to establish responsibility for an unlicensed pregnancy. You *know* that is not the situation. I am ninety-five years old—much older than you are—able to afford a dozen bastards if it suits me—and it may—and wealthy enough to tell the world to go pee up a rope. Jake, I was sharing happy news with you. You elect to treat it as bad news and take me to task about it. I won't accept that, sir. I made a mistake in telling you. Will you please treat the matter as privileged—and never mention it again?"

"Eunice."

"Yes, Jake?"

"I love you."

"I love you, Jake."

"Had I been twenty years younger—even ten years—I would have married you long before now. Since you won't tell me—and since I have no right to quiz you; you are correct—will you forgive an old man's pride if I choose to believe that *I* am the man you picked? I promise that I will not discuss that belief with anyone."

"JACOB, if you choose to believe that, I am honored. But I ask no promises. If you chose to proclaim such a belief, I would never shame my oldest and closest and most beloved friend by denying it. I would smile proudly and let my manner confirm it. But, Jacob my beloved, to *you* I neither affirm nor deny it—and never will. I did this on my own. I *alone* am parent to this child." (Watch your



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words, Boss! You almost spelled it out.) (He'll take it as rhetoric. Or if he does suspect, investigation will prove that he's wrong. Hank Olsen knows which side of his bed is buttered. Mine, that is.) (And the dates are going to check out so that Jake will be certain it's his. Hmm—) (Still think I'm a fool, Eunice?) (No, Boss—just reckless. You scare the hell out of me at times.)

"Well, Eunice, from the restrictions you *have* put on me that seems to be all we can say about it."

"That was my intention, Jake."

"I understood. What would you like to do the rest of today—at least until our newlyweds return? Play cribbage?"

"If you wish, Jake, certainly."

"I have a better idea. If you want to join me in it. Could be fun, I think."

"*Will* be fun, Jake. Anything is always fun shared with you. Even if it's just cribbage."

"This is a better two-handed game if it's played right. Let's phone Mac, ask him to have his clerk start the ball rolling—and get married. With luck we can be legal in twenty-one or -two—and still get in a couple of boards of cribbage before bedtime."

"Oh, Jake! *Cribbage*!"

"Answer me, woman. A simple Yes or No. I won't argue it . . . and I won't ask you again. And blow your nose and wipe your eyes—you're a mess."

"Damn you, Jake! *Yes*! Let me go and I'll blow my nose. I think you've cracked my ribs, you big brute. That's a hell of a way to treat an expectant mother."

"I'll do worse than crack your ribs if I have any more nonsense out of you. Now to call Mac—I'll have to think up a plausible lie so that he'll be justified in authorizing the County Clerk to issue a special license."

"Why does it have to be fancy, Jacob? I thought you were going to tell Mac that you had knocked me up?"

"Eunice, is that what you want me to say?"

"Jacob, I'm going to marry you as quickly as possible, I don't care how. I hope Winnie and Roberto show up in time but I'm not goint to wait; you might come to your senses. I thought you preferred to claim that you had done me in and I know I agreed to confirm it. So tell Mac so. Tell anybody."

"Doesn't fret you?"

"Jake dearest, maybe that's the best way to handle it . . . because, presently, God and everybody is going to know about the Silent Witness. Jake? Do you recall my first day of freedom? The day after Mac conditionally confirmed my identity and discharged me as a ward of the court?"

"My dear, I am not likely to forget *that* day."

"Nor I. Count two hundred sixty-seven days. That is when the Silent Witness should show up."

"You're telling me that I *am* the father of your child."

"Not at all, sir. I was in heat and had slipped the leash and you may assume if you wish that I spent the day bouncing in and out of beds,



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going from one man to another." She smiled beautifically. (Boss, that's awfully close to the truth—but it sounds like a whopper.) (It *is* the truth, Eunice; I worded it most carefully. That is the second best way to tell a lie—tell the truth so that is sounds like a whopper.) (And I thought *I* knew how to lie.) (I've had years more practice, Beloved—and as a kid had more reason to lie than you ever had. Lying is a fine art; it is learned only through long practice.)

"Knock off the nonsense, Eunice, or I'll start married life by giving you a fat lip. Okay, we'll tell Mac that; the truth is often the simplest solution. But we have to have health certificates; Mac can get us out of the waiting time but not out of that requirement. My doctor will phony one for me without stopping to take a blood sample and make tests, but how about that quack you mentioned? Will he cooperate?"

"Jake, I don't recall mentioning a quack. If Roberto gets here in time, I think he would take a chance. Or Rosy would, I think. I don't think I'm harboring even a cold bug unless I picked up something from Joe and Gigi. Most unlikely. But how about *you*, darling? Washington, D.C., has the highest V.D. rate in the country. Did you fetch anything home?"

"Oh, nothing but big and little casino."

"A nice girl like me can't be expected to understand such terms."

"You impudent little baggage, I slept *alone* in Washington. Can you make the same claim? For the past five days?"

"Of course not, dear; I've never been interested in sleeping alone—and Gigi is *very* snuggly. I commend her to your attention—take a look at that painting."

"I'm sure she is. Just Gigi, eh? Not Joe?"

"Is Joe snuggly, Jake? Tell me *more*!"

"Woman, you may get that fat lip *before* I marry you."

"The groom's present to the bride? Sir, if you want to give me a fat lip, I'll hold still, smile happily and take it. Oh, Jake darling, it's going to be such *fun* to be married to you!"

"I think so, too, you dizzy bitch. Mmm, my doctor will phony a certificate for you, too, if I explain the circumstances. But he'll need your blood type."

"Jake, the whole country knows that my blood type is AB-negative. Had you forgotten it?"

"Momentarily, yes. That's all I need. Except— Wedding here? Or in Mac's chambers?"

"Here, if possible. I want our servants for 'family' if Winnie and Roberto don't show up. Jacob, do I dare send a car with a message and ask Joe and Gigi to allow themselves to be fetched here for this purpose? I *do* want them present. Gigi is no problem; she will do as Joe wishes—but I think you know Joe better than I do. I don't even know that he has clothes he would be willing to wear here—all I saw him wear were denim shorts so caked with paint they could stand alone."



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"Mmm, I agree that Eunice's former husband is entitled to be invited to Joan Eunice's wedding, though there has never been a protocol established, that's certain. Dear, the clothes Joe wore in court would be okay for a home wedding. How about yourself, Eunice? Going to be married in white?"

"I think I've been insulted again. Wear white so that somebody can sneak a picture and sell it? 'Ninety-Five-Year-Old Sex-Change Bride Wears White.' Dear, if I wear white, let's ask *Life* to send a photographer and cut out the middle man. Jake, I'll wear white if you tell me to. If you don't, I'll pick something but it won't be white. Something."

" 'Something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue.' "

"Erase and correct, Jake. Here is the Twenty-First Century version:

"The bride is old,
"The license new,
"The body borrowed,
"The groom is blue."

"I am like hell blue, I simply need a shave. Get out now and let me be. Beat it. Go take a bath. Try to smell like a bride."

"Instead of pay day at Tillies's? I can take a hint. But *you* take a bath, too."

"Who notices the groom?"

CUNNINGHAM had a busy six hours. But so did everyone in the ugly old mansion. To the old-tradition strains of Mendelssohn's *Processional* the bride walked slowly in hesitation-step through the rotunda. (Twin, *Here Comes the Bride* always sounds to me like a cat sneaking up on a bird. Pum . . . pum . . . tee-pum! Appropriate, hnnn?) (Eunice, behave!) (Oh, I'll behave. But I prefer *John Jacob Jingleheimer Smith—his name is my name, too!)* (You can't know *that* one. It's eighty years old and long forgotten.) (Why wouldn't I know it when you were singing it in your head every second they were dressing us?)

She walked steadily down the center of a long white velvet carpet, through the arch and into the banquet hall, now transformed with flowers and candles and organ into a chapel. (Boss, there's Curt! I'm so glad he made it! That must be Mrs. Hedrick with him. Don't look at them, twin; I'll giggle.) (I'm *not* looking at them and you stop trying to—I must look straight ahead.) (You do that, Boss darling, and I'll count the house. There's Mrs. Mac—Norma—and Alec's Ruth, with Roberto. Where's Rosy? Oh, there he is, beyond Mrs. Mac. My, isn't Della dressed fit to kill?—makes us look shabby.)

The bride wore a severely simple dress of powder blue, opaque, with high neck, matching veil, long sleeves, matching gloves, skirt hem brushing the velvet runner and long train sweeping behind. She carried a bouquet of white cattleya dyed blue to match. (Twin? Why that last-minute decision for panties? They make a line that shows.) (Not through this gown; it's not skin tight. The 'bride's knot,' Beloved—for



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symbolic defloration.) (Coo! Don't make me laugh, Boss.) (Eunice, if you louse up this wedding, I'll—I'll—I won't speak to you for three days!) (Joan twin, I won't spoil it—Jake wants symbols, he shall have them.) (And *I* want symbols, too!) (And so do I, twin, so do I. It's just that I have never been able to see life as anything but a vast complicated practical joke, and it's better to laugh than cry.)

(Yes, darling—but let's not do either right now. I'm having trouble with tears.) (I thought they were my tears. Doesn't Thomas Cattus look handsome? I heard you order the *Lohengrin* recessional; that one is even funnier than the Mendelssohn—to an Iowa farm girl it sounds *exactly* like the triumphant cackle of a hen after she lays an egg. I'll laugh then, I know I will.)

(All right to laugh and cry both then, Eunice—and to hang on tight to Jacob's arm. Look, dearest, this is an old-fashioned wedding with all the clichés because Jake and I are old fossils and that's the way it *should* be.)

(Oh, I approve. Cunningham looks worried—can't see why; he's done a beautiful job. Boss, those panties struck me so darn funny because you ordered the *Bilitis* and the *Graces* to be placed on easels in the drawing room where everyone at the reception can stare at them. Riddle me that.) (Eunice, there is no inconsistency. A bride is supposed to be covered; those paintings are meant to be looked at. With Joe and Gigi here I darn well *want* them to be looked at!) (They'll be looked at. Stared at. Some wives may look at them with intense interest. Maybe.) (Maybe. Eunice, you know I've never asked a husband *not* to tell his wife anything; it's not right to ask one member of a married couple to keep secrets from the other. Besides, he will or he won't, no matter what you ask—and he should; he knows her better than we do. But those pix are as harmless as the fruit punch we have for those who turn down the champagne. It's irrelevant that I posed for them, I simply want Joe's genius to be appreciated. Enjoyed.)

Joe Branca had used no small part of his genius in making up the bride. Starting with a bare, clean canvas—fresh out of her tub—he had worked long and hard to make up Joan Eunice from head to toe with such restraint that even close inspection could not detect any trace of his efforts. As in "The Three Graces" it was simply Eunice's own beauty, invisibly enhanced—strongly enhanced, better than life, more natural than nature. He turned down the use of a hair fall and simply fluffed her own hair (still far shorter than Eunice's hair had been) and sprayed it slightly to keep it unmussed under her veil.

The bride's matron of honor was made up with much less restraint. Having seen the miracle wrought on Joan Eunice, Winnie had timidly asked Joan if she thought it would be all right to ask Mr. Branca to improve her a little? Since she was part of the wedding party? Joan and Gigi had enthusi-



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astically pushed the idea. Joe had studied Mrs. Garcia, then said, "Forty minutes, Joan Eunice—is time? Okay, Winnie wash face." The result exploited Winifred's red hair, made visible her transparent eyebrows and lashes, livened her too-white skin—yet looked more natural than the stylized face Winnie usually wore.

The matron of honor wore pastel-green tabard and tights and carried a smaller bouquet of green and brown cymbidia. She kept in step to the hesitation march thirty paces ahead of the bride, preceded her into the banquet hall toward the improvised altar.

Chief of Security O'Neil was the last one in, then posted himself in the archway at parade-rest and managed to watch events at the far end of the room while giving his attention to his rear. His features were serene but he was uneasy, alert. The big house was empty save for seventy-five to eighty people in this one room; all armor was up, every door, every real window was locked, hand-bolted, and dogged, and the night net of alarms switched on, and O'Neil had personally made sure of all this before releasing his guards to attend the wedding. But he trusted no gadgets and few people; he did not release himself from duty.

THE bride approached the far end. Jake Salomon waited there, with Alec Train at his side. Facing down the aisle were the Reverend Hugo White and Judge McCampbell, matching in dignity. Shorty was wearing a black frock coat, white shirt, string tie, and carried his Book; the Judge was in judicial robes.

(Boss, doesn't Jake look beautiful? But what is that getup?) (It's a cutaway, dearest.) (It's a museum piece.) (I suppose so. Jake probably hasn't worn it in thirty, forty years—or perhaps rented it from a theatrical costumer. I feel certain Alec had to rent his. Doesn't Father Hugo look grand!) (Must be his preachin' clothes, Boss. Joe ought to paint him in *this*, even if he never gets the pix he wants.) (Good idea, Eunice; we'll plant it with Gigi—and one thing may lead to another. I have hopes that seeing *The Three Graces* will gentle him, too. As Hugo *wants* to pose . . . if he can convince himself that it's not sinful. Eunice, my knees are shaking. I'm not sure I can do it!) (Om Mani Padme Hum, baby sister. We had one hell of time getting him off the dime; don't go chicken now.) (Om Mani Padme Hum, Eunice—hold my hand, darling; don't let me faint.)

Joan Eunice stopped in front of judge and preacher. Winifred took her bouquet from her, stepped back to one side. Alec Train moved Jake into place beside Joan Eunice, placed himself to balance Winifred. The music stopped. Hugo lifted his eyes and said, "Let us pray." (Om Mani Padme Hum. You okay, twin?) (I'm all right now. Om Mani Padme Hum.)

WHEN Hugo said, "Amen," Joe Branca slid in from the side, shot his first picture. Thereafter he moved around like a



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Chinese stage hand, disturbing no one and never moving at a crucial moment—but getting his shots.

Hugo opened his Book, did not look at it. "We read today from the Book of Psalms. It says here:

" 'The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

" 'He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters.

" 'He restoreth my soul; He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.

" 'Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil . . .

HE CLOSED his Book. "Brothers and Sisters, the Lord saw that Adam was lonely in the Garden of Eden and He said it is not good for man to live alone. So He created Eve to live with Adam. And He said to Adam, My son, you take care of this woman, you hear Me? You treat her right all the time, just like I was watching you every minute. Because I *am* watching you, every minute and every second. You cherish her and protect her like I tell you and you'll be too busy to get into anything wrongful, and she'll be a comfort to you all the days of your life."

He turned to Salomon. "Jacob Moshe, are you going to do that?"

"I will!"

The reverend looked at the bride. "And the Lord said to Eve, My daughter, you got to cook for this man and wash his clothes and bring up his babies and not go running around when you should be home, and love him even when he's tired and bad-tempered and not fit to speak to, because men are like that and you must take the bad with the good—you hear Me, Eve?

"Joan Eunice, are you going to do that?"

"Yes, Father Hugo."

"Judge—"

"Jacob Moshe, does there exist any impediment under our laws and customs to you marrying this woman?"

"None."

"Joan Eunice, is there any reason in law or in your heart why you cannot marry this man?"

"There is none, Your Honor."

McCampbell spoke more loudly. "If any witness knows of any cause which would forbid me to bind these two in marriage, I command him to speak." (Eunice, if anyone even clears his throat, I'll—I'll). (You'll keep quiet, Boss darling; that's what you'll do. Nobody here but our loving friends. Om Mani Padme Hum.) (Om Mani Padme Hum . . .)

"Jacob Moshe, will you love, honor and cherish her?"

"I will."

"Joan Eunice, will you love, honor, and cherish him?"

"I will love, honor, and *obey* him." (Huh? Boss you demon, you haven't the slightest intention of obeying!)

Salomon said, "Wait a moment! Judge, she switched the words! I don't expect that and I won't let her promise—"

"Order. You keep quiet, Jake; I'm not addressing *you*. Joan Eunice, is that what you wish to promise?"

"Yes, Your Honor." (Eunice,



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stay out of this. I know what I'm doing.)

"I must advise you that such a promise is not legally binding under the civil marriage contract of this state but I must warn you, too, that it is not a promise which should be lightly made in these circumstances."

"I know it, Your Honor." (Boss, you're out of your mind!) (Quite possibly. But it's all *right*, sweetheart. Jake is going to give us exactly the orders we will be humbly pleased to obey. Haven't I been right so far?) (Yes, but you keep scaring me. Suppose he tells us to keep our legs crossed? I've never been any good at *that*.) (He never will. Instead he'll be magnanimously pleased to humor our little follies—since we've promised to obey him. Relax, sweetheart—this is precisely the way my darling Agnes handled *me* . . . when I was not anything like as wise and tolerant as Jake is.)

"Let me hear you state your intention again."

"I, Joan Eunice, do solemnly promise to love, honor, and obey Jacob Moshe—and I will, Your Honor, even if he backs out and won't marry me. He doesn't have to marry me. I'd be perfectly happy just to—"

"Quiet, Joan Eunice. That's enough. Reverend, this is getting out of hand; I'm going to wrap it up with the bare legalities and you can plaster them with anything else they need in your closing prayer. All right?"

"Yes, Judge. They don't need much prayer; they're ready."

"I hope you're right. Jake, you heard this stubborn little, uh, lady. Are you willing to marry her anyhow?"

"Yes."

"Jacob Moshe, do you take Joan Eunice to be your lawfully wedded wife?"

"I do!"

"Joan Eunice, do you take Jacob Moshe to be your lawfully wedded husband?"

"I do."

"Uh, where's the ring? Alec. Jake, take her left hand in your left. Now."

"With this ring I thee wed."

"Under authority vested in me I pronounce you man and wife. Kiss her, Jake. Take it, Reverend." (And *you* told *me* not to louse it up!) (I got us there, didn't I? He's ours. I mean, we're his. Same thing.)

"Let us pray!"

## XXVI

ON LUNA, Kennedy Tunnel B, paralleling Kennedy Tunnel A between Luna City and the Apollo Industrial Complex, was completed and both tunnels were then made one-way, thereby quadrupling the potential traffic. The five- and ten-year projections caused the Commission to decide to go ahead at once with tunnels C and D. On the Hong Kong and New York Stock Exchanges Vacuum Industries, Ltd., Selenterprises, PanAm, and Diana Transport all took sudden jumps against a generally sagging market. Mercury Newsletter (subsid of MercServ) sent destructaped messages by special



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couriers to their 7-star clients. Nine percent of these couriers failed to report back, which caused the managing director of MercServ to decide that a vacation at Las-Vegas-in-the-Sky would be good for his health even though there was no proof that Internal Defense agents had detained the couriers or solved the "destruct" combo. A source close to the President denied that there was anything more than seasonal unrest in any city in the country and denounced "irresponsible rumormongers." CBS's *Today's Day with Dave Daly* was replaced by a motion picture with an explanation of technical difficulties. *Today's Day* resumed the next day without Daly, who was—it was announced—on sick leave to recover from extreme fatigue. Miss Molly Maguire, the hottest sensie star of the private film industry, claimed the title of first woman in history to give birth to a child during a sky dive. The babe was safely landed exactly as planned by the midwife team diving with her, the event was filmed in stereosound and color from several angles, and the only casualty was a sprained ankle for Miss Maguire—she was able to hold a press conference thirty minutes after she landed.

Since plane flight had originated in, and sky dive had started over, Mexican soil, whereas the entire party except the plane had landed in Arizona, it was not clear what laws had been violated or whose, or what nationality the child was—as Miss MaGuire's citizenship was Pakistani, with legal permanent residence in the States. The party surrendered voluntarily to the nearest U.S. immigration officer and Miss Maguire apologized most prettily on videocast for having reentered the country of her choice so informally through an inadvertent error in navigation by her pilot, plus a sudden gust of wind. They were released with a warning but the films were impounded—uselessly, as they seemed to show that the child was born, about fifty-fifty, in *both* countries, but factors of angle and parallax and identification of ground markings—in those film sequences in which the ground showed at all—made it impossible to be certain. Grove Press bought an option on the films, then entered suit to have them released, in the interest of justice.

A notorious sex-change case married her attorney but the newsworthy couple managed to leave for their honeymoon before issuance of their license was noted—a famous scoopsnoop chased them to Canada, only to find that the couple he had traced down were a Dr. & Mrs. Garcia, members of the wedding but themselves of no news value. Mrs. Garcia smiled and let herself be photographed (she was quite photogenic) and was interviewed about the wedding; then the Garcias returned home.

Senator James "Jumping Joe" Jones of Arkansas charged that the drive to repeal the XXXIst Amendment permitting prayer in public schools was a plot by the devil-inspired Pope of Rome and



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his servile followers. The rebuilding of the Oklahoma State House was halted by labor trouble drummed up (it was alleged) by the underground Equal Rights for Whites Action Committee. The contractor's construction foreman said, "Any honk thinks he's discriminated, he can take it to the hiring board and get a fair hearing. Trouble is these people they don't *want* to work."

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"MR. AND MRS. MACKENZIE" (Liberian passports) had the penthouse floor to themselves—three baths, four bedrooms, kitchen, dining room, bar-lounge, drawing room, lanai, garden, swimming pool, waterfall, fountain, garden bar-pantry, foyer, private lift, magnificent view of the yacht harbor, beaches, estuary, town, and mountains beyond.

But they were eccentric. Their rent included full hotel service but none of the hotel's staff had been on that level since their arrival. They were not seen at the casinos, nor on the beaches, nor were they known to make use of other attractions of the resort. They sometimes had room-service meals, but the table cart went only as far as the lift; their servants took it up.

It was rumored among the hotel staff that Mrs. MacKenzie liked to do her own cooking, but no one really knew—no one had seen her (save possibly from a copter) and few knew him by sight. Their servants had three suites on a lower floor . . . but were willing to discuss anything but their employers.

She came from the garden into the lounge. He looked up from his book. "Yes, dear? Too much sun? Or did that copter come back?"

"Neither. Copters don't worry me; I just turn over on my tummy so that they can't photograph my face. Jake darling, I want you to see something pretty."

"Drag it in here, I'm lazy."

"I can't, dearest; it's down on the water. A boat of some odd sort, with the gayest, most colorful sails. You were in the Navy; you know about such things."

"I was in the Navy one hitch fifty years back, so I'm an expert already."

"Jacob, you always know everything. And it *is* pretty, and quite odd. Please, sir?"

"Your slightest wish, Ma-



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dame." He got up and offered her his arm.

They stopped at the seaward rail. "Now which one? All those boats have colored sails. I haven't seen a suit of white sails since we got here—you'd think there was a law against it."

"*That* one. Oh, dear, they're putting down its sails. And it was so pretty a minute ago."

" 'Dowsing her sails,' Eunice. If I'm going to be your resident expert, let me expert. When you lower sails suddenly, you dowse them. Which this laddie is doing because he's standing in to anchor about—yes! There goes the hook. And a vessel is *always* 'she,' never 'it.' Boats and ships are female because they are beautiful, lovable, expensive—and unpredictable."

"Jake, you've always been able to predict what I'm going to do even before I know myself." (Twin, why tell a whopper like that? He knows better.) (He won't argue it, hon.) "But what is it?"

"Oh. It's a trimaran, a yacht with a triple hull. Can't say that I agree that she's pretty. A sloop with a triangular mains'l is my notion of beauty."

"Does look sort of squarish now. But swooping in with all its—sorry—her sails up, she was lovely." (Twin, ask Jake if he thinks there is any way we could go on it?) (On *her*, Eunice—not 'it.' Are you a sailor, hon?) (Never been on a boat in my life, Boss. But I'm getting an idea, maybe.) (Maybe I have the same idea. Are you thinking about that talk with Jake when he pointed out a farm would mean even more staff and less safety than our house?) (I don't care who thought of it first, Boss—just make sure that *Jake* thinks of it first.) (I shall, dear—do you think I have to be told that a ship is 'she'? Or can't recognize a trimaran? The real question is: Do *you* get seasick? I used to—and it's miserable. But the fact that we haven't had the tiniest bit of morning sickness makes me think you might be immune to motion sickness.) (So 'let's operate and find out,' as Roberto says.)

"Oh, trimarans have their points, Eunice. You get a lot of boat for your money. Roomy. And they are almost impossible to turn over—safer than most small vessels. I just wouldn't award one a beauty prize.'"

"Jake, do you think you could get us invited aboard that one? She looks interesting."

"Oh, there's some way to swing it. I might start by talking with the manager. But, Eunice, you can't go aboard a private vessel with your features veiled; it would be rude. Your granddaughters did you no favor when they made you as recognizable as a video star."

"Jacob, a veil doesn't enter into it because I *never* want to meet *anyone* as 'Mrs. MacKenzie.' I'm Mrs. Jacob Moshe Salomon and proud of it—and that's the way I must *always* be introduced. Jake, I doubt if our marriage is news any longer; it can't matter much if I'm spotted."

"I suppose not. The copters might swarm a mite closer for a while and some would have pix-



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snoops aboard with telescopic lenses. But I doubt if even your granddaughters are anxious to take a shot at you. If the snoops fret you, wear pants to sunbathe, and in the pool."

"The hell I will, it's our pool, Jacob. Anyhow, briefies can't conceal the fact that I'm pregnant and the sooner that's in the news the less it will interest anyone later. Let them sneak a pic, then you have Doctor Bob confirm it—and it stops being news. No huhu, dear; I learned years ago that you can't 'get away from it all'—you just have to cope. Is it possible, on a boat of that sort, to have a swimming pool?"

"Not one that size. But I've seen trimarans much bigger than that one. Could be done, I suppose, since a trimaran can have so much deck space for its tonnage—I'd have to ask a naval architect. Why the interest, Lively Legs? Do you want me to buy you a yacht?"

"I don't know. But boats look like fun. Jake, I never had much fun in my life—my other life. I'm not sure how one goes about having fun—except that every day is a joy to me now. All that I'm sure of is that I want to do something utterly different this time. Not be a Hetty Green. And not the gay, mad whirl of 'society'—*kark*! I'd rather turn whore. Would *you* like a yacht, Jake? Take me around the world and show me all those places you've seen and I never had time for?"

"You didn't take time."

"MAYBE it's the same thing. I do know that if a man acquires too much money, presently it owns him instead of his owning it. Jake, I've been to Europe at least fifty times—yet I've never been inside the Louvre, never seen them change the Guard at Buckingham Palace. All I saw were hotels and board rooms—and those are the same all over the globe. Would you care to repair my education, dearest? Show me Rio? You say it's the most beautiful city in the world. The Parthenon by moonlight? The Taj at dawn?"

Jake said thoughtfully. "The trimaran is the favorite craft of the dropout."

"Excuse me? I missed something. 'Dropout?' "

"I don't mean the barefooted bums in the Abandoned Areas, Eunice, nor the ones skulking around the hills. It takes money to drop out by water. But people do. Millions have. Nobody knows how many because it has been subject to an 'exception' for years—the government does not want attention called to it. But take those yachts below us: I'll bet that at least one out of ten has registration papers for some 'flag of convenience' and the owner's passport is as phony as that of 'Mr. and Mrs. MacKenzie.' He has to be registered somewhere and carry some sort of passport, or the coast guard wherever he goes will give him a bad time, even impound his craft. But if he takes care of that minimum, he can dodge almost everything else—no income tax, no local taxes except when he buys something, nobody tries to force his kids into public schools, no real estate taxes, no poli-



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tics—no violence in the streets. That last is the best part, with the cycle of riots swinging up again."

"Then it *is* possible to get away from it all."

"Mmm, not quite. No matter how much fish he eats, he has to touch land occasionally. He can't play Vanderdecken; only a ghost ship can stay at sea forever, real ones have to be put up on the ways at intervals." Jake Salomon looked thoughtful. "But it's closer to that antithetical combination of 'peace' and 'freedom' than is possible on land. If it suits one. But, Eunice, I know what I would do—if I were young."

"What, Jake?"

"Look up there."

"Where, dear? I don't see any thing."

"*There.*"

"The Moon?"

"Right! Eunice, that's the only place left with plenty of room and not too many peple. Our last frontier—but an endless one. Anyone under the cut-off age should at least *try* to out-migrate."

"Are you serious, Jacob? Certainly space travel is scientifically interesting but I've never seen much use in it. Oh, some fallout. Videosatellites and so forth. New materials. But the Moon itself? Why, it doesn't even pay its own way."

"Eunice, what use is that baby in your belly?"

"I trust that you are joking, sir. I hope you are."

"Simmer down, Bulgy. Darling, a newborn baby is as useless a thing as one can imagine. It isn't even pretty—except to its doting parents. It does *not* pay its own way and it's unreasonably expensive. It takes twenty to thirty years for the investment to begin to pay off and in many—no, *most*—cases it never does pay off. Because it is much easier to support a child than it is to bring one up to amount to anything!"

"*Our* baby will amount to something!"

"I feel sure that it will. But look around you; my generalization stands. But, Eunice, despite these shortcomings, a baby has a unique virtue. It is always the hope of our race. It's *only* hope."

She smiled. "Jacob, you're an exasperating man."

"I try to be, dear; it's good for your metabolism. Now look back up at the sky. *That's* a newborn baby, too. The best hope of our race. If *that* baby lives, the human race lives. If we let it die—and it is vulnerable for a few more years—the race dies, too. Oh, I don't mean H-bombs. We're faced with far greater dangers than H-bombs. We've reached an impasse; we can't go on the way we're headed—and we can't go back—and we're dying in our own poisons. That's why that little Lunar colony has *got* to survive. Because *we* can't. It isn't the threat of war, or crime in the streets, or corruption in high places, or pesticides, or smog, or education that doesn't teach; those things are just symptoms of the underlying cancer. It's too many people. Not too many souls, or honks, or thirds—just . . . *too many*. Seven billion people, sitting in each other's laps, trying to take in each



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other's washing, pick each other's pockets. Too many. Nothing wrong with the individual in most cases—but collectively we're the Kilkenny Cats, unable to do anything but starve and fight and eat each other. Too many. So anyone who can ought to go to the Moon as fast as he can manage it."

"Jacob, in all the years I've known you I've never heard you talk this way."

"Why talk about a dream that has passed one by? Eunice—Eunice-Johann, I mean—I was born twenty-five years later than you were. I grew up believing in space travel. Perhaps you did not?"

"No, I didn't, Jake. When it came along, it struck me as interesting—but slightly preposterous."

"Whereas I was born enough later that it seemed as natural to me as automobiles. The big rockets were no surprise to my generation; we cut our teeth on Buck Rogers. Nevertheless I was born too soon. When Armstrong and Aldrin landed on Luna I was pushing forty. When out-migration started, with a cut-off age of forty, I was too old; when they eased it to forty-five, again I was too old—and when they raised it to fifty, I was *much* too old. I'm not kicking, dear; on a frontier every man-jack must pull his weight, and there is little use for an elderly lawyer."

He smiled down at her and went on: "But, darling, if *you* wanted to out-migrate I wouldn't try to dissuade you; I'd cheer you on."

"Jake!" (He can't get away from us that easily!) (You're darn tootin' he can't! I'll fix him.) "Jake my own and only, you can't get away from me that easily."

"Eunice, I am serious. I could die happy if I knew our baby was to be born on the Moon."

She sighed. "Jacob, I promised to obey you and I happily do so. But I *can't* go to the Moon—as an out-migrant. Because I'm even farther past the cutoff age than you are—the Supreme Court says so."

"That could be fixed."

"And raise an issue over my identity again? Jacob darling, I don't *want* to leave you. But —"she patted her belly and smiled—" if *he* wants to go to the Moon, we'll help, at the earliest age they'll take him. All right?"

HE SMILED and gently patted her slight bulge. "More than all right. Because I don't want his beautiful mother to go away for any reason. But a father should never stand in the way of his son."

"You don't. You aren't. You won't. You never would. Jacob Junior goes to the Moon when he's ready, but not *this* week. Let's talk about trimarans and *this* week. Jake, you know I want to close up our house—I'd sell it but nobody would buy it other than as land; it's a white elephant. But two things have bothered me. It has to be left garrisoned, or the Free People will break in despite all armor, and squat—then some day some judge grants them title on adverse possession."

Jake said, "Certainly. Historically, that's where all land titles



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come from. Somebody standing on it, defending it and saying, 'This is mine!' And lately the courts have been cutting down the period of adverse possession. Especially in city cores close to Abandoned areas—and your house is both."

"I know, dear—but I don't want to surrender it to squatters. Darn it, that house cost me more than nine million, not counting taxes and upkeep. The other worry is what to do about our in-house staff. I'm sick of being a feudal lord—erase and correct; lady, now." (Erase and correct—'tart' now.) (Certainly, Eunice, but I haven't been too tartish since we got married.) (Not much opportunity, twin—but you're getting restless. Huh?) (*Who* is getting restless? Never mind, twin sister, the day will come. But we won't rub darling Jake's nose in it.) "I can't just let them go; some have been with me twenty-odd years. But if we buy a yacht—and live on it—I think I have a solution to both problems."

"So?"

"I think so. It's an idea I got during our wedding, thinking about that farm."

"Well! Wench, you were supposed to be thinking about *me*."

"I was, dear. But I seem to be able to think about several things at once, since my rejuvenation. Better blood supply, possibly." (My help, you mean, Boss.) (Yes, dear. Same thing.) "Our banquet hall, dressed as a chapel, looked more like a church than it has ever looked like a place to eat. So here's my notion. Give our house to Shorty. Give it to his church in a trust setup, with Alec, maybe, as a trustee, and also Judge Mac if he'll do it. Arrange the trust for perpetual maintenance, with ample funds and a good salary for Hugo as pastor. Is this practical?"

"No difficulty, Eunice, if you really want to unload the house—"

"I do. If you consent."

"It's your house, dear, and I decided a long time ago that being a householder in a big city was more headache than pleasure. We could still keep my little house in Safe Harbor—no fear of squatters—if you want a *pied-à-terre*. We won't do it quite as you described it but you can give your house to Shorty if you wish to. I'll get Alec to work out a plan. But I wonder if Shorty can cope with it? Squatters might still move in on him—or rioters break in and wreck the place."

"Oh. That fits in with the other half of my idea: What to do about our too-faithful retainers. Offer any with twenty years or close to it retirement at full pay. Encourage the in-house guards and maintenance men to work for the trust, same pay—because you're right; if we hand an illit a place like that, with no one to keep him straight, he'll soon have a shell, not a church. Father Hugo is the best bodyguard I've ever seen . . . but he's a child of God and unsophisticated about management. He needs a practical, cynical man as his in-house steward. Cunningham. Or O'Neil. Or Mentone. Alec can work it out. Jake, I want to hand over to Shorty a complete plant, subsidized and main-



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tained, so that he can put his mind solely on preaching and praying and soul-saving. I think you know why." (I think *I* know why, Boss—but any of the four would have killed that mugger.) (We've managed to thank the other three, beloved—and will go on thanking them. Father Hugo is a special case.)

"Eunice, do you really think Hugo saves souls?"

"I HAVEN'T the slightest idea; Jacob; I don't know Who is in charge of this world. Even if what Hugo does has no more real meaning than our 'prayer meetings,' it's still worth while. Darling, this is a screwed-up world. Back in the days of the Model-T Ford the United States was a fine country, brimming with hope. But today the best thing most young people can do is stay home, sit still, not get involved and chant *Om Mani Padme Hum*—and it *is* the best thing most of them are capable of doing, the world being what it is now; it's far better than dropping out or turning on with drugs. When meditation and a meaningless prayer are better than most action open to them, then what Hugo has to offer is good in the same way. Even if his theology is a hundred percent wrong. But I don't think Father Hugo is any more mistaken than the most learned theologian and he might be closer to the truth. Jacob, I don't think *anyone knows* Who's in charge."

"Just wondered, my dear. Sometimes pregnant women get taken with fancies."

"I'm pregnant down *here*, dearest; up *here* is still old Johann. Protects me somewhat, I think." (Oh, you think so, huh? Boss, if you didn't have me to keep you straight, you'd be as filled with vapors as a cat trying to have kittens in a wastebasket! Remember, I've been through this before.) (I know you have, darling, and that's why I'm not afraid—otherwise I'd be scared silly.) (No worse than having a tooth drilled, Boss; we're built for this. Roomy.) "Jake, did I ever tell you about the time I went into politics?"

"Didn't know you ever had and can't imagine it, Eunice."

"Imagine it for 'Johann,' not for 'Eunice.' Forty years back I let them persuade me that it was my 'duty.' I was easy to persuade—but I realize now that my attraction to the Party was that I could pay for my campaign in a district they were going to lose anyhow. But I learned things, Jake. Learned that being a businessman has nothing to do with being a politician and even less to do with being a statesman. They *clobbered* me, Jake! I've never been tempted to save the world since. Maybe someone can save this addled planet but *I* don't know how and now I *know* that I don't know. That's something even if it isn't much. Jake, I could worry about Smith Enterprises when I was running it. I can worry now about sixty-odd people and make sure they're each all right insofar as money can insure it. But no one can solve things for seven billion people; they won't let you. You go nutty with frustration if you try.



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Nor can you do much for three hundred million, not when the real problem—as you pointed out— is the very fact that there *are* three hundred million of them. I can't see *any* solution short of compulsory sterilization—and the solution strikes me as worse than the disease. Licensing without sterilization hasn't solved it."

Her husband shook his head. "And won't, Eunice. Licensing is a joke; it has more loopholes than the tax laws. Compulsory methods inevitably involve politcal tests—no, thanks, I prefer the Four Horsemen. And the only effect that voluntary contraception has ever had has been to change the ratio, unfavorably, between the productive and the parasites; the population climbs anyhow. If we were as hard-boiled about weeding the culls as China is, it might not work that way. But we aren't, we never have been—and I'm not sure I'd like it if we were."

"Then there isn't any solution."

"Oh, there is—I mentioned it. The Four Horsemen. They never sleep, they're never off duty. And *there*." He pointed at the Moon. "Eunice, I suspect that our race's tragedy has been played endless times. It may be that an intelligent race has to expand right up to its disaster point to achieve what is needed to break out of its planet and reach for the stars. It may always—or almost always—be a photo finish, with the outcome uncertain to the last moment. Just as it is with us. It may take endless wars and unbearable population pressure to force-feed a technology to the point where it can cope with space. In the universe, space travel may be the normal birth pangs of an otherwise dying race. A test. Some races pass, some fail."

She shivered. "Gruesome."

"Yes. And no way to talk to a gal in what used to be called a 'delicate condition.' Sorry, darling."

"A gruesome thought at any time, Jake. I'm *not* in a 'delicate condition.' I'm doing what this body is designed for. Building a baby. Feels *good*. I'm enjoying it."

"So it appears and that makes me happy. But, Eunice, before you shut down your house and move into a yacht, I must mention one thing. I think you must put it off until you've had this baby."

"Why, Jake? No morning sickness. I doubt if seasickness will be a problem."

"Because you *are* in a delicate condition, no matter how good it feels. I'd feel happier if you were never more than five minutes from medical attention. You'd be okay at home; Bob and Winnie are there. You're okay here—a hotel resident physician and a good one—believe me, I checked on him—and a modern hospital over there, in sight. But at *sea*? Suppose you had a seven-month preemie? We'd lose the baby and probably you, too. No, Eunice."

"Oh." (Eunice, any point in telling him that you carried your first one full term and no trouble?) (No, twin. How are you going to prove it? If you mention me *now*, you're just a female with pregnancy delusions. Boss, this is one argument



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you're going to lose. So concede it at once. Fall back and find another route.) "Jacob, I can't argue. I lost my first wife with her first baby; I know it can happen. But what would you think of this? Could you persuade Roberto and Winnie to come with us? Then not go very far to sea. If we were anchored where that trimaran is, that hospital would be just as close . . . and Roberto would be aboard. This hotel physician must be all right as you have checked on him but I would rather have Roberto. He knows me inside and out. And never mind wise cracks; I mean as my physician. Or does the fact that you know that Roberto has slept with me make him unacceptable to you as my O.B. man?" (Whew! Twin, that was a foul blow.) (Oh, pooh, Eunice, I'm just confusing the issue.)

JAKE SALOMON cocked one eyebrow and grinned down at her. "Little one, you can't embarrass me that easily. If Bob is the baby-cotcher you want, I'll do my best to persuade him . . . as long as *you* don't mind Bob's wife being around."

"Pooh to you, sir. If you and Winnie want to stroll down memory's lane, I'll tuck you in and kiss you goodnight. She's certain to console you while I'm benched—and you'll need it."

"Thereby giving you carte blanche later. A woman almost always falls in love with the doctor who delivers her first baby."

"Pooh again. I've loved Roberto a long time and you know it. Are you jealous, Jacob?"

"No. Just curious. I suppose that injuction you laid on me on our wedding day still applies? It occurs to me that, with respect to the day you mentioned, Bob had opportunity before, during, and after."

"Is that all it takes, dear? Just opportunity?" (Just about, twin!) She grinned at him and wrinkled her nose. "Sweetheart, all I will admit is the possibility that Roberto's name might be in the hat. But it could have been Finchley. Or Hubert. Or dear Judge Mac. You and Alec were awfully busy that day—but I think you'll find that Mac adjourned court at his usual hour . . . and I wasn't home until much later."

"Is that a confession?"

"Well, there might be a confession in there *somewhere*."

"Quit pulling my leg, my love. There are only two sorts of wives. Those who cheat, and those who have their husbands' friendly cooperation, in which case—"

"Isn't there a third sort?"

"Eh? Oh, you mean *faithful* wives. Oh, certainly. So I've heard. But in my twenty years of general practice, much of it divorce cases, I encountered so few of *that* sort—none I felt certain about—that I cannot venture an opinion. Wives technically faithful form so small a part of the sample that I can't evaluate them. People being what they are, a rational man should be satisfied if his meals are on time and his dignity not affronted. What I was trying to say is, that if you ever want my friendly cooperation, don't assault my credibility with a wet firecracker



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such as Hubert. Judge Mac I could believe. Tom Finchley is a very masculine person, too, and one who bathes regularly—even though he sometimes abuses the sacred English tongue in a manner which causes me to flinch. Bob Garcia shows your good taste. But, *please*, darling, don't expect me to believe that Hubert's name could be in the hat." (Twin, Jake knows us too well. Better not try to fool him too much.) (Ever hear of a 'red herring,' love?)

"Very well, sir; I'll take Hubert's name out of the hat. That still leaves endless possibilities, does it not? And I will try always to respect your dignity. But, speaking of meals on time, I had better get busy or your dinner will be late."

"Why not just cold cuts and such when we feel like it and heat a tin of soup? I was thinking of a nap."

"Shall I join you, sir?"

"I said 'nap,' sweetheart. Sleep. A nap with you is not restful. Old Señor Jacob needs a siesta."

"Yes, sir. May I finish quickly what I was saying? We can take care of anyone who wants to retire, or wants another job, or wishes to stay on with Hugo. But I am hoping that some of them might come with us as crew in our trimaran or whatever. Especially if they've been to sea before and know something about it."

"Finchley does. He was sent up for smuggling or some such."

"I was hoping that all of my mobiles except Hugo—and Rockford, if you want him—might decide to sail with us. They are all strong and able and not much family problem. Fred's wife split some months back, Dabrowski has no children at home and Olga might be willing to be a chambermaid—stewardess, I should say—if she likes to sail; she's insisted on doing most of the cleaning and such here even though she doesn't have to. As for the Finchleys, Tom is just what we need—it wasn't smuggling drugs; they were running arms into Central America as I recall, and he was first mate—and Hester Finchley is a good cook. Eve is no problem, she already knows how to read and write and do arithmetic—and if they tell her about this, she'll be teasing her parents to take the job; all kids want to travel. Dear? If you are going in, would you see who's on guard at the lift and ask him to dig out Finchley? He may know something about trimarans."

"I think he has the watch now. Shall I chuck you a robe?"

"Am I getting too much sun? Doesn't feel so; I've been using the lotion. *Oh!* You mean for Thomas the Tom Cat? But, dear, we've been swimming with him and his family every day. As well as with Fred and the Dabrowskis."

"I don't give a hoot, dear, but I thought you were anxious to preserve appearances."

"Seems silly when I swim and sunbathe with all of them. As for appearances, didn't I see you patting Hester's bottom in the pool yesterday? Or was it Wednesday?"

"It was Tuesday and it wasn't Hester, it was her daughter Eve. Just practicing to be a sex maniac, Beautiful—nothing serious. So don't be jealous."



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"Beloved, the day I'm jealous of a little girl I want you to beat me. Not spank me. Beat some sense into me, woodshed style. But it was Hester, not her daughter. My gallant, wonderful Jacob would never bother a little girl."

"Perhaps not but that little girl bothers the hell out of *me*. Furthermore she does it on purpose."

"Poor Jake. Even thirteen-year-olds won't leave him alone. I'm not surprised; I didn't leave him alone, either."

"In this case, she's thirteen-going-on-twenty-one. I'll make you a deal, dearest. I'll carefully avoid chaperoning you with her father if you will be *very* careful *always* to chaperone me with his daughter."

"Yes, sir. To hear is to obey, my lord—though I am chagrined that you think I might need chaperoning—or not chaperoning, as the case may be—with one of our servants. But how about Hester? Must I always be sure to be in sight when she's around?"

"Mind your own business, Wench. Uh—no need to be fanatical about it. I want them all to feel easy when they come up here to swim as I don't want *any* of our household ever to swim in that sewage down there. You know the coliform count in that beautiful surf. That was the deal we offered—stay off the beaches entirely and they could swim in our pool at any time. So we sacrifice a little privacy but don't have one of them picking up amebiasis or such and spreading it through our whole family. It evens out—and they are all nice people . . . even our precocious Eve who's doing her best to see if she can upset me."

"I haven't minded, Jacob; it is not good to be too much alone. But we were speaking of Hester's bottom. Shapely, huh?"

"Hon, you're as bad as Eve. I'm going to go and say ten Money Hums and catch that siesta. I'll send out Tom. Don't let me sleep more than an hour. Kiss."

SHE turned her face up. As he left she dived in, swam a couple of lengths and climbed out, was waiting, staring down at the yacht harbor when Finchley arrived. "You sent for me, Ma'am?"

She smiled. "Thomas Cattus, that's not my name when we're alone."

He glanced over his shoulder, said almost soundlessly, "Pussy Cat, the Boss is awake."

"So he is. But he's gone to his room and closed the door. Siesta. He'll be asleep in almost no time. But I don't mean to scare you, Thomas Cattus dear. Come here to the rail, want to show you something. Have you done any sailing? Or has it all been power?"

"Sailing? Oh, sure, I grew up on Chesapeake Bay. Cat boats and such."

"Ever sail a trimaran?"

"Never skippered one. Crewed in one when I was sixteen."

"What do you think of them?"

"Depends on what for. Okay if you want something more like a houseboat than a racer. But I wouldn't have one without an auxiliary engine. In tight waters they can be as awkward as two people in a bathtub."



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"Ever try it in a bathtub, Thomas Cattus?"

"Sure, who hasn't? Okay for a giggle with a few drinks aboard. But a bed is better. Or a floor."

"How about a sunbathing mat?"

"Pussy Cat, you *enjoy* scaring me. You gonna get us caught, yet."

"Rhetorical question, dear; I wasn't twisting your arm. Tell me, do you think Hester and Jake have ever made it?"

"Practically certain they never." He grinned at her. "But I can tell you something."

"Then do. Pretty please. Pretty Tom Cat with the muscles."

"Not Hester's fault they haven't. I know. She told me bang, one night, while we were at it. Said the Boss could have it anytime he reached for it. Hester thinks the Boss is God's right hand."

"Well, so do I. But it doesn't keep me from appreciating my Thomas Cat. How would you feel about it? Jake and Hester."

"Me?" He looked astonished. "Look, Pussy Cat, you know if anybody does I don't see no sense in putting a fence around a broad. Just makes her want to jump it. I'd ruther hold open the gate for her, she wants to."

"I said, 'How would *you* feel about it, dear?' "

"Oh." Her driver-guard looked thoughtful. "Wouldn't get my nose out of joint. The Boss is numero uno, da kine. Rozzer?"

"Roz."

"He knocked up a broad, he'd pay. No huhu. But no huhu anyhow; we were only licensed for one and Hester had herself fixed, right after she had Eve. Good broad I married—didn't split when I dropped one, took me back when I was paroled. Oh, she shacked, sure—but just with her boss, she worked. Didn't peddle it. Or kept it to herself, didn't tell me. Hester and the Boss? Sure, if they want to. Told her so, bang. Have fun, I told her."

"Mmm . . . Thomas Cattus, let's give them a chance. Or six chances. Might be insurance for us, later."

He nodded thoughtfully. "Smart thinking, Pussy Cat. But how? And would he? The Boss?"

"I feel sure he would if he knew it was safe. Private, I mean; Jake has courage under fire, just as you have, dear. Main problem is to get Eve out from underfoot. Mmm . . . you could take me shopping or such and I could ask Hester to get Mr. Salomon's lunch . . . then as an afterthought I could invite Eve to come with me. Hmm?"

"With either Fred or Ski up here? No good, Pussy Cat."

"All it needs is a time when you have the guard. Jake won't send for your relief; at most he'll lock open the lift door. He doesn't worry about *him*, he worries about guarding *me*."

"Mmm . . . roz. Could work if he wants it. You're filling out, Pussy Cat. Tits prettier than ever."

"Joe says a woman gets prettier as she bigs out. But I don't think many men think so."

"Hester looked awful cute, clear up to the last minute. And on you it looks good, too. Uh . . . you're sure the Boss is asleep?"



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"Certain enough that I'm willing to risk it. But I *don't* mean to scare you, dear. Want to wait and see how our plans for Jake and Hester work out?"

"Uh . . . oh, hell, we might all be dead by then."

"Right here?"

"Uh, copter might cruise by."

"Let's go into the lanai."

## XXXII

HARVARD University Corporation voted to withhold all funds until the Student Government selected a new university president. Both of the rival student governments and the faculty senate sought court relief from this "reckless and irresponsible action." CONS BEST COPS SEZ FUZZ PREZ—the General Secretary of the Private Police, Guards and Security Drivers (AFL) at its annual banquet congratulated Milwaukee on joining the growing list of municipalities that had abolished the "clean record" rule in hiring peace officers. "The outstanding success of parolees and probationers as licensed private security officers is finally teaching the politicians to 'hunt ducks where the ducks are.' The Bible says 'To catch a thief you set a thief,' don't it? Who knows more about hoods than a hood? Give a man incentives to keep his nose clean and put him on work he understands and you can count him in the crunch. My Mom kept telling me that when I was just a punk knockin' over candy stores. Besides, like the Sec'etary of the Treasury told us earlier tonight, '*Look* what it's done for the economy!' In this *great* republic—"

"Today's Day" newscast interviewed a midwife who claimed to have delivered Miss Molly Maguire of child ten days *before* her sensational two-nation sky dive. The sensie star promptly sued newscaster, station, and videonet.

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The Lunar Commission made permanent its trial policy of screening out-migration solely on physical and mental examination with no percentage points either plus or minus from past record. The Director said: "In a new world a man must start with a clean slate. No other policy is practical." Under sharp questioning he admitted that contributions for unsubsidized vocations remained unchanged but insisted that this was a fiscal matter controlled by the condominium governments and in no way affected the basic principle. HOT WORDS IN CAPPUN DEBATE: " '—does not deter!' So he tells us. Is the Senator from the great State of Puerto Rico aware that our major problem is recidivism? Can the Senator cite *one case* in which a killer com-



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mitted still another murder *after* he was executed?"

"WHEE! Joe, see how she runs before the wind!"

"Swell."

"Gets me clear down in my gizzard," Joan Eunice said happily. "Let's go aft. Winnie's got the wheel and be sure to be impressed; she's proud as can be that Tom has let her go on the watch list. She's a natural sailor, salt water in her veins. Gigi, what's the matter, dear? You aren't smiling. Feeling queasy?"

"Uh, a little, maybe."

"I must admit that the 'Pussy Cat' does have a rocking-horse motion when she's running free. Love it myself but some don't. Never mind, dear; Doctor Roberto has a sure-fire pill for tipsy tummy. I'll fetch you one and in five minutes the motion won't bother you and you'll be hungry as a horse."

"I don't take pills, Joan. I'm all right."

"You aren't all right and when we go below you won't want lunch and Hester told me she was fixing something special in your honor. Look, darling, Roberto feeds these pills to *Winnie*—one before breakfast every day and he had her on them for morning sickness before they came aboard. He's a careful doctor, hon; he wouldn't give them to his own wife if they could hurt. Nobody ever gets a pill of any sort in the 'Pussy Cat' unless our ship's surgeon dispenses it. Pretty please? Huh?"

"Gigi."

"Yes, Joe."

"Take pill."

"Yes, Joe. Thanks, Joan, I do feel fluttery. I guess you think I'm silly but I've seen so many kids hooked on pills I'm scared of 'em."

"I don't like pills but I take 'em when Doctor Roberto says to. He's got me on supplements right now for this little monster inside me. You stay up here in the breeze, dear, while I find Roberto."

"SAILING, sailing, over the bounding main!" Mr. Salomon bellowed, as he swung up into the control console. "Hello, Ski."

"Good morning, Captain. On port tack with basic course one five—"

"I see what it is. Beat it down below and get your breakfast." Salomon slid into the saddle and glanced at the compass as he took the wheel. "We didn't leave you anything but you can scrounge ship's biscuit out of the lifeboat."

"Hester won't let me starve, sir."

"Nor Olga. Now beat it." Jake eyed his sails, decided he could point a touch higher, reached out with his right hand to the running rigging controls, kept tapping a switch to shorten his main sheet, his eye on her mainsail, while he handled the wheel by touch till he had her settled down on a tighter tack. Then he adjusted his jibs and relaxed.

"Good morning, Captain."

"Tom, save that for witnesses. It's all very well for Mrs. Salomon to want me dubbed with an honorary title but we all know who's the sailing master by our ship's papers. You're skipper and have the responsibility; I'm just the



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owner and unlicensed first mate. Eunice ought not to do it—but we have to cater to the little darlings. Speaking of little darlings, how are your two this fine morning? Didn't see Eve at breakfast."

"She ate before you got up, sir. Seen her and told her she's goin' to have to wear pants from now on, except in the pool or near it."

"Don't see why she should, the other gals don't unless it happens to suit them. I just don't want her swarming into my lap, naked as an eel and twice as lively. Gives me delusions of youth."

"I'll clamp down on her, sir."

"Tom, I *don't* want the child clamped down on. I want everybody to enjoy this cruise—one big happy family. Ask Hester to tell her quietly that old Uncle Jake loves her but doesn't like to be pawed. A lie, that last, but an official lie. Speaking of the pool, how's the filter?"

"Filter's okay, was just a clog in makeup feed line. Kelp. No huhu."

"Has the surgeon tested the water?"

"Safe."

"That's good. Tom, when I was a kid, striking for quartermaster third, we used to swim off the boat booms and thought nothing of it. But today even the Pacific Ocean can't soak up all the crud they dump into it. You can put swimming call on the bull horn and take the Skull-and-Crossbones sign off the pool."

"Aye aye, sir."

"Half a second while I make eight bells." Jake reached out with his left hand, picked the last touch plate of a row of eight; the quadruple double *Bong*! marking the beginning of the forenoon watch rang through the vessel. He then picked still another touchplate and sounded swimming call himself. "Tom, if a man didn't have to eat or sleep he could sail this wagon around the world by himself. Three men could do it easily. Even two."

"Maybe."

"You sound doubtful, Tom."

"Even one man could, sir—if nothin' never went wrong. Something always does."

"I stand corrected. And with two pregnant women aboard—three if you don't keep a close eye on Eve—"

"Oh, Dr. Garcia got her on the junior pill. I don't take no chances, sir."

"So? Tom, my respect for you—high—has just increased. She's safe from her Uncle Jacob . . . but I make no promises about any other male in this bucket. There is something in salt air that hikes up the metabolism. And there is much truth in the old saw about 'when they're big enough, they're old enough and nothing can be done about it.' Better to roll with the punch."

"She is and she has and we did—I had this here talk with the Doc. Hester and me don't expect no more from Eve different than we did ourselves. Anybody knows when a broad starts getting broad she's goin' to land on her back."

"Yes, everybody knows it—yet most parents don't believe it when it comes to their own kids. I know, I had a family law practice for years. Tom, you're such an all-



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around sensible man I'm surprised that you ever got into trouble."

HIS sailing master shrugged. "Comes o' believing what I was told, sir. 'M chief officer of this rust bucket and Captain says keep my lip tight and see nothin' and we make ten times as much on one voyage. All fixed. Only he got smart and hung onto the bribe money hisself. Thought he could run it in the dark. You'd 'a' thought he'd never heard of radar. *Wham!* Coast Guard." Finchley shrugged again. "No complaints, sir, I was a fool. But two years and four months and I get this much better job driving for Mr. Smith-as-was. Smellin' like a rose. Not so trusting now, is all. Don't trust too much, you don't get your ass burned."

"Yet you don't seem cynical. Tom, I think the major problem in growing up is to become sophisticated without becoming cynical."

"That's over my head, Counselor. I just think people are okay, mostly—even that silly skipper—if you don't strain 'em more than they're built for, like that piece of standing rigging there. Rated three tons. Pro'ly take five and no trouble. *Don't* put six tons on it."

"We've said the same thing, I think, but your illustration is vivid. Beat it, Tom. If there's no work to be done, grab sack time. Or pool time."

"Yes, sir. I want to inspect the starboard hull; it's making extra water. Pump can handle it but I want to know *why*." He touched his cap and swung down off the platform.

Jake cocked his own cap against the sun, relaxed and started to sing.

*A sailor's wife a sailor's star shall be!*
*Yo ho, we go, across the sea!*
*A sailor's wife a sailor's star shall be,*
*A sailor's wife his star . . . shall be!*

His wife climbed up behind him and kissed the back of his neck. "Is that for me, dear? Or for 'Nancy Lee'?"

"Always for you, my darling. Besides, I can't remember the part with 'Nancy Lee' in it."

"I wonder if you ever remember a girl's name. You call all of us 'darling.' "

"Merely because it's true. But *you* are the only one I call *my* darling. And I do remember your name—it's Salomon."

"Jacob, you must have been a prime menace when you were a bluejacket. With that Hebrew blarney you could talk your way into anything. Then out of it, with no trouble."

"No, Ma'am, I was a sweet, innocent lad. I simply followed the ancient code of the sea: 'When the hook's up, all bills are paid.' "

"Leaving little Jewish bastards behind in every port . . . and thereby improving the breed. How about Gigi? Going to improve the breed there?" She dug her thumb into a spot over his hip where his slight pot bulged out from sitting. "Some dish, eh, keed?"

"Madam," he said haughtily, "I



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do not know what you are talking about."

" 'Tell that to the Marines, the old sailors won't believe you.' Jacob my love, I feel certain that you know the second Mrs. Branca almost as well as you knew the first. But I have no wish to prove it; I simply offer my congratulations. Gigi is a darling, I love her to pieces. I was not throwing asparagus." (Tell him she squeals, twin.) (I will not!)

"Woman, you get your exercise jumping at conclusions."

(Then tell him it happened where Troy Avenue crosses Gay Street, near the Square—a neighborhood *you* know well, twin.) (Eunice, I want Jacob to feel easy about such things—I am *not* trying to harpoon him.) (You aren't equipped to, Joan; Jake is the original Captain Ahab.) (Eunice, you have a dirty mind.) (*Whose* mind? I don't have one. Don't need one.)

Mrs. Salomon dropped the subject, opened her sextant case, took it out. "Will you give me a time tick, darling?"

"Are you going to shoot the defenseless sun?"

"I'm going to do better than a sun sight, dearest. The sun, the upper limb of the Moon and—if I'm lucky and can spot it again—Venus, for a three-star fix. Want to bet on how small a triangle I get?"

"Even money on fifty miles for the short side."

"Beast. Brute. Cad. And me an expectant mother. I was more than ten times that close yesterday evening; I'm getting the hang of it. I *could* cheat—I could get a point fix by querying Point Loma, then fudge it on the chart."

"Eunice, why this passion to emulate Bowditch? One would think that radio and satellites and the like had never been invented."

"It's fun, darling. I'm going to hit that nav exam for a flat four-oh and get my limited license. After I've unloaded this pup in the hopper and we no longer have to stick to coastal waters, I'm going to do a 'Day's Work' every day all the way to Hawaii. Betcha I make landfall at Hilo under three miles. Oh, it's not necessary, dear—but what if it turned out to be? Suppose war broke out and everything went silent? Might help to have a celestial navigator aboard. Tom admits that he's hardly taken a sight since he got his mate's ticket."

"If he ever took one. Yes, it could be useful, my darling . . . because if war broke out in earnest and we would not go on to Hilo. We would make a sharp left turn and go south and get lost. The Marquesas. Or farther south, the farther the better. That way our kid might live through it. Easter Island if you think you can hit it."

"Jacob, by then I'll split it right down the middle. Or any island you pick. Sweetheart, I wasn't playing games when I asked for the whole old-fashioned works—all the charts, all the pilots, three key-wind chronometers and a hack, this lovely sextant and a twin like it in case I drop this one . . . and please note that I *always* put the lanyard around my neck. All the H.O.s and the Almanac. I'm no use



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as a deckhand now—so I decided to become a real navigator. Just in case, just in case."

"Mmm. My darling, I hope we never have to run for it . . . but have *you* noticed that I keep this vessel fully stocked at all times even though we anchor almost every night and can shop for supplies any time we wish?"

"I've noticed, sir."

"Nor is it an accident that I gave Doctor Bob an unlimited budget and saw to it that he is equipped for any conceivable obstetrical problem."

"I did not notice that, quite."

"YOU weren't meant to, nor was Winnie—no need to give you gals something to worry about. But since you have been doing the same sort of planning ahead, I decided to tell you. Bob used the time the 'Pussy Cat' was being refitted in taking a refresher in O.B. And he spent twenty times more money on our sick bay than one would expect for a sea-going yacht."

"I'm pleased to hear it, sir. With such foresight, money can do almost anything. Except turn back the clock."

"It even did *that* in your case, Beloved."

"No, Jacob. It gave me added years . . . and this wonderful body . . . and *you*. But it did *not* turn back the clock. I'm still almost a century old. I can never *feel* young the way I once did—because I'm *not*. Not the way Winnie is young. Or Gigi. Jacob, I have learned that I don't *want* to be young."

"Eh? Are you unhappy, dear?"

"Not at all! I have the best of two worlds. A youthful, vital body that makes every breath a sensuous joy . . . and a century of rich experience, with the wisdom—if that is the right word—that age brings. The calmness. The long perspective. Winnie and Gigi still suffer the storms of youth . . . which I don't have and don't want. I've forgotten the last time I had a tranquilizer but I think it was the day they unstrapped me. Jacob, I'm a better wife for you than either of those two lovely girls could be; I'm older than you are, I've been where you are now and understand it. I'm not boasting, dear; it's simply true. Nor would *I* be happy to spend my time trying desperately not to upset his delicate, youthful, unstable balance. We're good for each other, Jacob."

"I know you are good for me."

"I know I am. But sometimes you have trouble remembering that I am *not* truly 'Eunice,' but 'Johann.' " (Hey! What is this, Boss? We're *both*.) (Yes, beloved, always—but Jake needs to be reminded of Johann—because all he ever *sees* is Eunice.) "For example, Jacob, a while ago you thought I was twitting you about Gigi."

" 'Thought,' hell—you *were*."

"No, dear. Close your eyes and forget that I have Eunice's voice. Think back at least ten years when I was still in passable health. If your older friend Johann had twigged that you had kicked the feet out from under some young and pretty woman would he have twitted you?"



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"Huh? Hell, yes. Johann would have slipped me the needle and broken it off."

"*Would* I have, Jacob?" Did I *ever*?"

"You never caught me."

"So? I might have congratulated you, Jacob, just as I did today—had I felt that I could do so without offending you. But I would *not* have twitted you. Do you recall a young woman whose first name was—or is—Marian? Last name had the initial 'H'—your pet name for her, 'Maid Marian.' "

"*How* in the *hell*?"

"Steady, darling—you let your helm fall off. That was sixteen years ago, just before I asked you to spend all your time on my affairs. So I ordered a fresh snoop-sheet on you before I put the deal up to you. May I say that the fact that you had dealt so carefully with *her* reputation was a strong factor in my deciding that *I* could trust you with anything, too? Including my power-of-attorney, which you have held ever since and never abused? May I add, too, that I *wanted* to congratulate you on both your good taste and your success as a Lothario? For, of course, I then had to have *her* snooped, too, and her husband as well, before I could entrust my grisly secrets to you. But—also of course—I could not say a word."

"I didn't think any part of that ever showed."

"Please, Jacob. Do you recall that you once told Eunice that you could hire a man to photograph her in her own bath—and she would never know it? As we've noted, money can do almost anything that is physically possible. Part of that snoop report was a photograph of you and Marian in what you lawyers call a 'compromising position.' "

"Good God! What did you do with it?"

"Burned it. Hated to; it was a good picture and Marian looked awfully pretty—and you looked all right yourself, you loveable old goat. Then I sent for the head of the snoop firm and told him I wanted the negative and *all* prints *now* and no nonsense—and if it ever turned out that even one print had escaped me, I would break him. Get his license, bankrupt him, put him in jail. Were you or Marian ever embarrassed by such a picture? Blackmail?"

"No. Not me—and I'm morally certain she wasn't, either."

"I guess he believed me. Jacob, do you still think I was twitting you about Gigi? Or was I congratulating you?"

"Uh . . . maybe neither. Maybe trying to wring a confession out of me. It's no go, wench."

"Please, Jacob. Stipulating that I was mistaken but sincere—which was it? Now that you know how I behaved about Marian."

"Eunice—*Johann!* You should have been a lawyer. Subject to that stipulation, I concede that it must have been a sincere congratulation. But one I can't accept—I haven't earned it. Now, damn it, tell me how you came by this delusion."

"YES, dear. But not this minute; there comes Gigi her-



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self." Joan put her sextant back into its box. "Sights will have to wait anyhow; this reach has taken us in so close I've lost my horizon for the Sun. Hi, Gigi, you pretty, pretty thing! Give us a kiss. Just me, Jake is on watch."

"I'm not all that busy. Eunice, hold the wheel." He accepted a kiss while still seated, then took the helm back from his wife.

Joan said, "Been swimming, dear?"

"Uh, yes. Joan Eunice, could I see you a minute? Mr. Salomon, would you excuse us?"

"Not by that moniker I won't; you'll have to call me Jake."

"Stuff it, dear," his wife said cheerfully. "She wants a hen conference. Come along, dear. Captain, try to keep us afloat."

They found a spot in the lee of the lifeboat. "Got troubles, dear?" (Eunice, are we about to have a beef over Jake? Surely not!) (Can't be, twin. That affair started over two weeks ago . . . and both Gigi and Joe were relaxed about it from scratch. Which means just what we thought: It actually is a return engagement—and Jake lied to protect a lady's reputation. Predictable.)

"Well, sort of," admitted Mrs. Branca. "Uh, might as well say it bang. Next time you anchor and send a boat in . . . Joe and I want off."

"Oh, dear! What's wrong, Gigi? I did so hope you would stay at least the month we talked about—then as much longer as you wished."

"Well . . . we did expect to. But I got this seasickness problem and Joe—well, he *has* done some painting but . . . the light's not right; it's too bright and . . . " She trailed off. (Twin, those are excuses.) (Jake?) (Can't be, I tell you. You've got to make her come clean.)

"Gigi."

"Yes, Joan?"

"Look at me. You haven't missed a meal since Roberto put you on the seasick pill. If Joe prefers floodlights to sunlight, we'll clear out the dining saloon and it can be his studio. Put your arms around me and tell me what's *really* wrong."

"Uh— Joan, the ocean's just too darn *big*!" Gigi blinked tears and said, "I guess you think I'm a baby."

"No. It's big. Biggest ocean in the world. Some people don't like oceans. I do. That doesn't mean *you* have to."

"Well, I *thought* I would like it. I mean, you hear about it. What a wonderful thing it is to make an ocean trip. But it *scares* me. Uh, it scares Joe, too; he just doesn't say so. Joan Eunice, you've been awful good to us—but this isn't our scene. Joe and I, we aren't fish—we're alley cats. Always lived in cities. It's too *quiet* here. Especially at night. At night the quiet is so loud it wakes me up."

Joan kissed her. "All right, darling. I knew you weren't having quite the happy time I wanted you to have. Didn't know why. I'll have to visit you at your place—where it's nice for all of us. *I* don't like the city, *it* scares *me*. But I like it, loads, in your studio—as long as I don't have to go outside. But is that



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*all* that's wrong? Has anyone upset you? Or Joe?"

"Oh, no! Everybody's been swell."

"You called Jake 'Mr. Salomon.' "

"That was because I was upset—knowing I had to tell you."

"Then you both feel easy with Jake? I know he's impressive, he even impresses *me*. Nothing uptight there?"

"Oh, not a bit! Uh, knowing we were walking out on Jake upset us as much as knowing we were walking out on you."

"Then may Jake and I *both* come visit you? Stay a few days?" (Will she duck this, Eunice?) (Why ask me, Boss? You just asked *her*.)

Mrs. Branca dropped her eyes, then looked up and said bluntly, "You mean a Quartet? All the way?"

"All the way."

"Well, *we* would, I guess you know that. But how about Jake?"

"Well? How about Jake, Gigi? *You* tell *me*."

"Uh, Jake is relaxed with *us*. But he's a little uptight when you're around, seems like. Joan Eunice, you caught on. Didn't you? Or you wouldn't have braced me for a Quartet."

"I caught on, dear. It's all *right*. No huhu."

"I *told* Jake I thought you had. He said, Oh, no, impossible, you slept like a log."

"I do, except that I've reached the point in pregnancy where I sometimes get up to pee. But that wasn't it—Jake could be most anywhere if he's not in bed and I never check on him. What I spotted wasn't proof. Just that a man has a way of looking at a woman he's sure of. And vice versa. Nothing anybody could object to. Just 'not uptight' describes it as well as any. I'm not even mildly jealous of Jake, it simply pleased me. Knowing how sweet you can be for a man—remember, I used to *be* a man—"

"I know. But I don't really believe it."

"I have to believe it and can't ever forget it. Knowing you, I felt smugly pleased for my husband. Tell me, have you made a Three Circle with Jake? Money Hum?"

"Oh, yes, always!"

"Next time—at your studio—it will be a Four Circle. Then our Quartet will harmonize perfectly and no one will ever be uptight again."

"Yes. *Yes*!"

"In the meantime you're not going to have to put up with this great big scary ocean even one more night. We won't anchor, I'll have Tom call for a copter—say for right after lunch. It'll put you down at La Jolla International and you'll jet straight home—copter pilot will see to things for you and Tom will have your reservations—and you'll be home and flashing a pack in your own studio before you can say, 'Time Zone.' Feel better?"

"Uh, I feel like a heel but—yes, I do. Oh, Golly, Joan, I'm so *homesick*!"

"You'll be home today. I'm going to find Tom and have him get things rolling. Then I'll go tell Jake—and tell him why, he'll understand—and relieve him at



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the wheel, and tell him he can find you in your stateroom. If you have the nerve of a mouse, little alley cat from the big city, you'll bolt the door and tell him good-by properly. Uh—Troy? Or twosome?"

"Oh. Troy. Of course."

"Then find Joe and tell him. Ten minutes, maybe fifteen. But Gigi—that painting of Eve. I must buy it."

"No, we'll give it to you."

"We settled that long ago. Joe can give me anything else, but not paintings. I must pay for it because I want it to be a present from me to my husband. Now kiss me and run, dear."

THE *Pussy Cat* with her sails doused rocked gently on a light sea. Fifty feet above her tallest stick a copter hovered while again lowering a passenger-freight basket. Tom Finchley stood far aft and coached the copter pilot with hand signals. Mr. and Mrs. Branca had already disappeared into the copter cabin, having gone up on the first trip, but their baggage was on the weather deck, waiting to be loaded.

There was quite a pile. Joan had urged them to fetch along "everything you could possibly need for a month or longer—for painting especially, as there will be lots of bodies around—and any of them will model . . . or I'll have them lashed to a grating and flogged, then make them walk the plank. Joe darling, you can do *big* romantic pix if you wish—pirate scenes with lush victims and leering scoundrels. Fun?"

She had sent the invitation by MercServ with tickets and an air-freight order and instructions to MercServ to supply a reader for the message. Joe had taken her literally; he seemed to have cleared out his studio—flood lamps, spots, easels, a heavy roll of canvas, stretchers, cameras, photo equipment and supplies, assorted impedimenta—and one bag each for clothes and personal articles. Seeing what Joe had fetched, Joan was glad that she had ordered a Brink's to get them to the jetport and was careful today to have one meet them at the far end.

The basket took up a load of baggage, came back for the last. Fred and Della's sixteen-year-old Hank, an eager but untrained deck hand, were loading, taking turns keeping the basket from spinning while the other placed items in it.

Soon they had it all in but one large case, when a gust of wind disturbed the uneasy balance between copter and surface craft. The basket swung wildly; Fred let go and danced aside while Hank went flat to the deck to keep from being hit by it.

Fred recovered and again braced the basket, now ten feet farther forward. Joan Eunice grabbed the handle of the last case, then used both hands. "Whew! I think Joe packed the anchor in this one."

Jake yelled, "*Eunice*! Don't lift that! You want to miscarry?" He grabbed it from her, started for the basket.

Hank was on his feet again. "Here, Captain, I'll get that!"

"Out of my way, son." Jake trudged to the basket, found it too



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high, got the case into his arms, then up onto one shoulder, placed it carefully inside—and collapsed. Joan rushed to him.

Aft, Tom Finchley noted when the last item went in, looked up at the copter's pilot and signaled "Hoist away!" and added the hand signal for "That's all—on your way!"

Then he looked down—and started to run.

Joan sat down on the deck, took Jake's head and shoulders to her. "Jake, Jake, darling!" (Eunice! Help me!)

Fred said, "I'll get the doc!" and rushed for a companionway. The boy stood helplessly by. Salomon gave a long bubbling sigh and all his sphincters relaxed. (Eunice! Where is he?) (Boss, I can't find him!) (You've *got* to find him! He can't be far.) (What in hell?) (Here he is, here he is! *Jake*!) (Eunice, what happened? Somebody slammed me in the side of the head with a brick.) (Does it hurt, darling?) (Of course it doesn't hurt, Boss, not now. It *can't*. Welcome aboard, Melancholy Jacques you lovin' old bastard! Oh, boy, am I glad to see you!) (Yes, welcome home, darling. My darling. Our darling.) (Eunice?) (No, *I'm* Eunice, Jock. Old cocky Jock. That's Joan. Or Johann. Or Boss. No, Joan is 'Boss' only to me; you'd better call her 'Joan.' Look, shipmates, let's get this Troy straight before we get tangled up in our feet. Joan, you call our husband 'Jake' same as always—while I'll call him 'Jock' as I used to. Jock, you call Boss either 'Joan' or 'Johann' as suits you and she's either 'Joan' or 'Boss' to me. And I'm always 'Eunice' to either of you. Got it straight?)

(I'm confused.) (No huhu, Jock beloved, never any huhu again. You'll get used to it, I did. Joan has to drive while we'll sit back and neck and give advice. Tell him, Joan.) (Yes, Jake. You have us both now. Forever.) (Om Mani Padme Hum.) (Om Mani Padme Hum. Join us, Jake. A Thanksgiving.) (Om Mani Padme Hum!) "Om Mani Padme Hum."

"Joan. Let me have him, dear." Dr. Garcia was bending over her.

She shook her head. "I'll hold him, Roberto." (Boss! Knock off the female kark and let dear Doctor work.) (Yes, Eunice. Hang on tight to Jake.) (Never fear, dear; I shall. Jock, can you see now? Out of Joan's eyes. We're going to move.) (Of course I can see. Who's that ugly old wreck? *Me*?) (Of course not; that's just something we don't need any longer. Look away, Joan; you're upsetting Jock.)

"Fred, take her below. Hank, help him. Tom, I need Winnie. Get her."

DR. GARCIA found Joan in the saloon. She was lying down, a wet cloth over her forehead, with Olga Dabrowski seated by her. Tom Finchley followed the doctor in, his face solemn. The doctor said nothing, took Joan's wrist, glaned at his watch.

Then he said, "It's bad news, Joan."

"I know, Roberto. He was gone before I came down here. (He's *not* gone, Boss. Don't put it that way.



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Jock is *dead*, as dead as I am. But not *gone*. Right, Jock?) (I think you're splitting hairs, Lively Legs—) ('Lively Legs!' You haven't called me that in a *long* time.) (How about last night?) (You called *Joan* that; you didn't call *me* that, not last night.) (Will you two keep quiet? Or at least whisper? I've got to cope.)

(Sorry, Boss. Jock darling, whisper to me *very* quietly. Is Joan better at it than I am?) (Eunice, I can still hear you—and you have your tenses mixed.) (Boss darling, there are no tenses in the Eternal Now. I asked Jock a question—and he's too chicken to answer.) (I certainly am!) (Oh, well. With my equipment and my coaching, Joan is probably adequate by now. Plus a good start—you won't believe this, Jock, but Boss has the *dirtiest* mind. That lady-lady act is just an act.) (Twin, quit trying to get my goat. I'm busy, Roberto is worried about us.) (Sorry, twin. I'll be good.)

"Eunice, I want to make one thing clear. It would not have made any difference if it had happened ashore with all possible life-support at hand. Even with Dr. Hedrick at hand. Oh, we could have kept him alive—as a vegetable. Nothing else."

"Jake never wanted that, Roberto; I've heard him say so, emphatically. He never approved of the way *I* was kept alive."

"The two cases are a hundred and eighty degrees apart, Joan. Your body was worn out but your brain was in good shape. In Jake's case—well, I gave him that physical before we put to sea; his body was in fine shape, for his age. But I know what the autopsy will show: a massive rupture of a large blood vessel in his brain; he died at once. A cerebral 'accident' we call it, because it's unpredictable. If it's any consolation, he didn't suffer."

('Didn't suffer,' eh? Try it, Bob—it felt like a kick in the head by a mule. But you're right, it was just one blow. Not even a headache, afterward.) (About the same for me, Jock darling, when I got it. Boss had a much rougher time, for *years*.) (What if I had? It's over now. Darlings, *please* keep quiet—we'll talk when they let us alone.)

"Doctor, there will be no autopsy."

"Joan, there should be an autopsy for your peace of mind."

"It won't bring Jake back and he wouldn't like it. As for my peace of mind, I have just one question. Was it . . . too much honey moon?"

"Oh. No, just too many years. Joan, it wasn't even from lifting that heavy load. Let me explain this sort of 'accident'. It's like a weak spot in an old-fashioned pneumatic tire, worn almost through and ready to blow out—then *anything* can trigger it. Jake could simply have stood up and keeled over—today, tomorrow, last week. Oh, it *can* happen during intercourse, you often hear men say they want to die 'while tearing off one last load.' But it's a horrible experience for the woman involved—and probably isn't a last orgasm anyhow, more likely he's chopped down just before it.

"Far better the way Jake got it,



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still virile—I assume—" (You know darn well Jock was 'still virile.' Ask your wife. Ask Gigi. Hell, ask *anybody*.) (Eunice, was my behavior *that* blatant?) (Not blatant at all, Jock you lovin' old goat. But news gets around.) "—or I should say 'I know' as I was his physician. Jake was happy and strong and virile—and then he was through, like snipping a film. Don't worry about 'too much honeymoon.' Getting married may have saved Jake years of hopeless senility. Or it may have chopped two weeks off his life as a small price for much happiness. But more likely it *extended* his life; a happy man functions better. Forget it, dear. When my time comes I hope I get it the way Jake got it—quickly, and happy to the end."

"Then there is no point in an autopsy, Roberto. Will you sign a death certificate?"

"Well . . . when death takes place not in a hospital and not under medical care, it is customary to notify the authorities and—"

"Roberto!"

"Yes, Joan?"

"YOU'RE *not* going to do that to Jake. Notify *whom*? Somebody in Washington? We're in Federal waters, and the coroner of San Diego county has no proper interest in this death. But he'd be likely to try to milk it for publicity, once he finds out who Jake is, who *I* am—and I *shan't* let that be done with Jake's death. Jake *was* under medical care—*yours*! You're our ship's surgeon. It might be that you saw him die. Think about it." (Joan, don't ask Bob to lie. It doesn't matter if some coroner has his M.E. chop me up.) (I shan't permit it! Besides, Jake, I'm pregnant. Do you want me to have to go through *that*? Crowds and questions and pulling and hauling and sleepless nights?) (Mmm . . . tell him to make it an airtight lie, dear.) (Boss is a stubborn bitch, Jock—but she's usually right.)

"Hmm—" Dr. Garcia took off his stethoscope, put it aside. "Now that you mention it, there was still some heart action after I reached him. Lacking means to determine the instant of brain failure I am forced to take cessation of heart action as the moment of death." (That boy would make a good witness, girls—come to think about it, he *did* make a good witness at the identity hearings.)

"In that case, Doctor, it seems to me that the circumstances are not open to question—and you may be sure that I will spend any amount of money to keep anyone from turning Jake's death into a circus at any later time. I would like you to certify death and the circumstances and mail a copy to whatever *Federal* authority should be notified—when next we touch ashore. No copy elsewhere, we have no permanent residence other than this vessel. Oh, mail a copy to Alec Train; he has Jake's will, he'll need one for probate. And be sure to supply Captain Finchley with a duplicate original for the log."

"All right, Joan, since that's the way you want it. And I agree: Here



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we have a natural death and there is no point in letting bureaucrats poke around in it. But—right now I want to give you something to make you sleep. Nothing much, just a heavy dose of tranquilizer."

"Roberto, what was my pulse?"

"That's none of a patient's business, Joan."

"It was seventy-two, dead on normal—I counted my heart beats during that thirty seconds from your first glance at your watch until you let go my wrist. I need no tranquilizers."

"Joan, your heart action should be higher than normal—under the circumstances."

"Then possibly I need a stimulant, not a tranquilizer. Roberto, you sometimes forget—even though you have been through the whole thing with me—that I am *not* a normal patient. Not a young bride subject to hysteria. Underneath I am a very old man, almost three times your age, dear . . . and I've seen everything and no shock can truly be a shock to me. Death is an old friend; I know him well. I lived with him, ate with him, slept with him; to meet him again does not frighten me—death is as necessary as birth, as happy in its own way."

She smiled. "My pulse is normal

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because I'm happy—happy that my beloved Jake met death so easily and happily. Oh, I'll go to my cabin and lie down; I usually nap during the heat of the afternoon. But how about Eve?"

"Eh?"

"Have you done anything about *her*? She's young, she's probably never seen death before. She almost certainly needs a tranquilizer—not I."

"Uh . . . Joan, I've been busy. But— Olga. Will you find Winnie and tell her I said that Eve was to have a minimum dose of Tranquille?"

"Yes, Doctor."

Mrs. Dabrowski left.

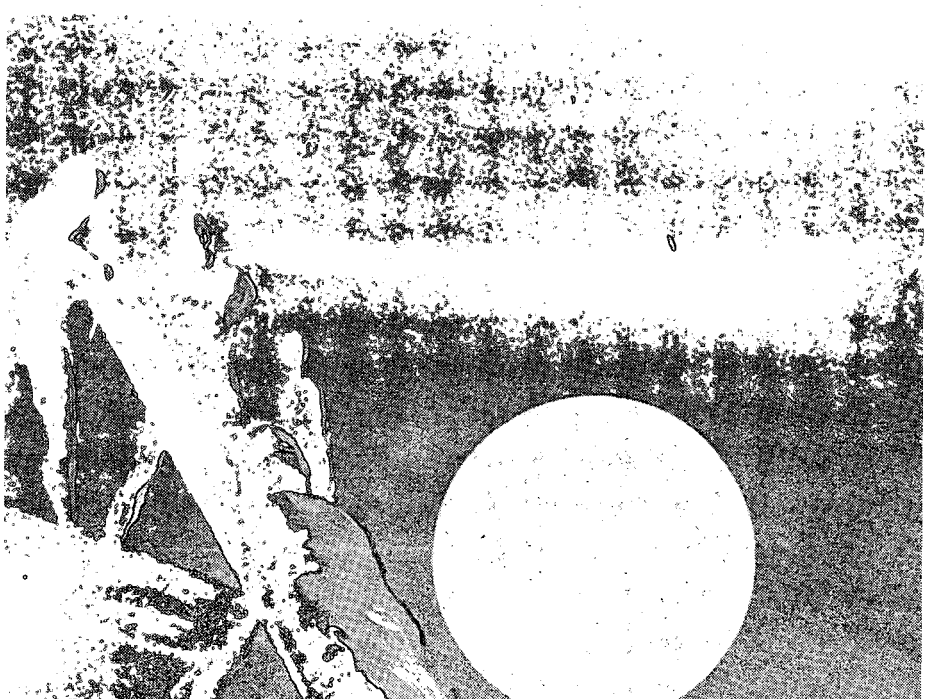
"Now, young lady, I'll take you to the cabin."

"Just a moment, Doctor. Captain, will you get way on with both sails and auxiliary and make course for the nearest point of the seventy-five-mile limit? I want us to be in international waters before sundown."

"Aye aye, Ma'am. That would be about west by south, maybe basic course two-six-oh. I'll plot it."

"Good. Then pass the word, quietly, that burial services will be at sundown."

"Joan!"





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"Roberto, do you think I would turn *Jake* over to an *undertaker*? Taxidermists! He wanted to die like his ancestors; I shall bury him like his ancestors—his dear body untouched and returned home before the sun sets."

" 'TO every thing there is a season, and a time for every purpose under the heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die—' "

Joan paused in her reading. The sun was an orange-red circle almost touching the horizon. On a grating at the rail, steadied by Fred and the Doctor, Jake's body waited, sewed into canvas, with ballast weights at the feet. (A primitive rite, Johann.) (Jake, if you don't like it, I'll stop.) (Jock, you should be respectful; this is a funeral.) (It's *my* funeral, isn't it? Do I have to pull a long face for my own funeral? Johann, I *do* like it. I respect symbols, primitive symbols especially. Thank you for doing this—and thank you most of all for not letting my carcass fall into the hands of licensed ghouls.) (Just wanted to be sure, Jake. I'd better go on; I've marked several more passages.)

(Go on, Johann. Just don't try to pray me into Heaven.) (I shan't, Jake beloved. We three will face whatever comes, together.) (Right, Boss. Jock knows it.)

" 'All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again. Who knoweth the spirit of man?'

" 'Two are better than one. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up. Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm alone?' " (Boss, that reminds me. Do we have to sleep alone tonight?) (Damn it, Eunice, don't you *ever* think of anything else?) (Come off it, Boss. What else is worth thinking about? Stocks, bonds and other securities? I've been telling Jock about your discovery—that sex is more intense for a woman than for a man. He doesn't believe it. But he's eager to find out.)

(Jake, are you *that* eager? I intended to show respect for your memory.) (I appreciate the thought, Johann. But you needn't carry it to extremes. I can't see why you should mourn me when I'm still here. Uh, tell me—is it *really* better?) (Let him judge for himself, Boss—whether it's better to spread Eunice . . . or to *be* Eunice. A more scientific comparison than you have been able to make.) (Quit talking like a kinsey, Eunice. All right, partners; I'll think over the chances. But I'll be damned if I'll make a disgraceful spectacle out of us tonight. Not *this* night. It's got to be discreet—or no game.) " 'And if one shall prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.' "

(Boss, I like that. This makes up for the funeral I never had. Not even a memorial service.) (But you did have a memorial service, Lively Legs.) (I *did*? Who was there?) (Just me, dear. I hired a little chapel and an organist. I read a couple of poems you used to like. Some flowers. Nothing much.) (Jock, I'm dreadfully touched.



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Boss! He really *does* love me. Doesn't he?) (He does, darling—we both do.) (I wish I'd been there, Jock.) (I didn't know where you *were*, dearest. Maybe just as well, you're not very well behaved at funerals.) (Oh, pooh all over you, you dirty old ghost—nobody can hear me.) (Careful whom you call a ghost, Lively Legs; it might slop over on you. Let Joan get through with this and splash it.)

"'Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might—' '—for thy days are few and they are numbered—' '—man goeth to his long home.' 'The silver cord is loosed, the golden bowl is broken.' From the deep we came, let the body of our brother Jacob now be returned to the deep."

Joan closed the Book; Fred and Dr. Garcia lifted the end of the grating; the body fell into the water, disappeared.

She turned away, handed the Book to Mrs. Dabrowski. "Here, Olga. Thank you."

"Joan, that was beautiful. I don't see how you did it."

"Wipe your eyes, Olga; farewells must never be sad—and Jake was ready to go. I knew my husband well, Olga; I knew what he wanted, it was not hard."

She pressed Olga's hand and turned away. "Winnie! Stop that. Stop it at once. Jake does not want you to cry." (What makes you think so, Johann? I feel flattered by having a lovely little creature like Winifred weep over me.) (Oh, pipe down, Jake. You were the star of the show, now stop taking bows. Talk to Eunice.) Joan took the smaller woman in her arms. "You mustn't, Winnie Really you mustn't. Think of your baby."

WINNIE bawled against her shoulder. "Joan, don't you miss him at all?"

"But, darling, how can I miss Jake when he has never left me? The Jewel is *still* in the Lotus, and always will be. Eternal Now."

"I guess so—but I just can't *stand* it!"

(Dear Doctor, maybe? He'll be giving Winnie a sleeping pill, surest thing.) (Not Roberto, Eunice. Under his aggressive atheism he's got a touch of what he was brought up on—he'd be shocked. Some other night.) "Roberto, you had better take care of Winnie."

"I will—but are *you* all right?"

"You know I am. I have a prescription for you, however."

"All right. It won't hurt you to take a real knocker-outer tonight. Say phenobarb."

"Let's *not* say 'phenobarb.' My prescription is for Winnie. Get her to eat something. Then sit with her and recite the Money Hum for at least a half hour. Then take her to bed and hold her in your arms and let her sleep. And *you* sleep, sir; you've had a rough day, too."

"All right. Do you want to join us in saying them? We could come to the cabin—then you could go straight to bed. I've learned that it's better than barbiturates."

"Doctor, if you wish, you may come to my cabin at nine o'clock tomorrow morning—and kick me out of bed if I'm not up. But I will be. Don't go there any sooner than that. Tonight I shall recite that



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hypnotic prayer. With Jake. He'll be able to hear me . . . whether you think so or not."

"Joan, I have no wish to attack anyone's faith."

"You haven't, dear. I appreciate your solicitude. When I need it, I will draw on it—freely. But now you take care of Winnie." (Boss, how about Fred? No one to dodge. Jock, you'll be right in the middle. Lucky Adolf. But Fred won't know it.) (Eunice, you're out of your pointy little head. We almost scared Fred to death once before, just by being *us*. Before we got him gentled. Look at him, he's worse off than Winnie. With nobody to console him. But *we* can't console him, not this night.)

"Captain."

"Yes, Ma'am?"

"Let's bust up this wake. People should not stand around moping. Meal hours have become disorganized; can Hester throw together some cold supper quickly? Perhaps with volunteer help? I'd volunteer but I have something to do." (Oho! The Tom Cat. Jock, this is going to be fun.) (Lively Legs, is there a man in this vessel you gals haven't spread for?) (Oh, sure, Jock honey. Hank. He's got his eye on Eve and thinks we're an old hag. And now that her Uncle Jock has left her, Eve might trip him.) (Now that I'm dead, I regret having resisted that delicious little jailbait. Wouldn't have cost me more than a million to buy my way out of trouble—and I had a rich wife.) (If you two lechers will shut up a moment, I'll set you straight about something. *Not* Thomas Cattus. Certainly not before the midwatch and could be later with this wind against us. Captain Tom Finchley is going to be busy skippering.) "Captain, I want you to get way on and set basic course for San Clemente Island anchorage."

"Yes, Ma'am." He trailed after her and added softly: "I better start calling *you* Captain now. Set an example."

She stopped. They were sufficiently alone that she could speak privately by lowering her voice. "Tom Cat."

"Yes?"

"Don't call me Captain—*you* are Captain until I've passed my tests. Then we'll see. And don't call me 'Ma'am.' I'm either 'Mrs. Salomon' or 'Joan,' depending on the company, just as before. But in private I'm still your Pussy Cat. I hope I am."

"Well . . . okay."

"Let's hear you say it."

"Pussy Cat. Brave little Pussy Cat. Puss, you surprise me more, longer I know you."

"That's better. Tom Cat, Jake knew all along about your tomcatting with me." (Oh, what a lie! Eunice, she *never* told me—and I suspected only once and decided I was mistaken.) (I know, Jock. Boss is a deceitful one and not at all truthful and besides she tells fibs even to *me.)*

"He *did?"*

"Yes, Thomas Cattus. But Jake Salomon was a true gentleman and saw only what he was expected to see. He never teased me about my little follies. Simply indulged me. But he didn't tell on himself, either. Do you know if he ever



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made it with Hester?" (Now see here, Johann—) (Pipe down, Jock; I've wondered, too.)

"Uh . . . hell, Pussy, all men are alike, all after the same thing."

"And all women are alike, we've all got it. Well?"

"Hester spread for him first chance we gave 'em. But she didn't *tell* me. Ashamed. Had to catch 'em at it, then twist her arm."

"Surely you didn't hurt her?"

"No, no, Puss, I don't rough a broad, never. Didn't catch 'em, not to hurt, neither. Backed out fast—then *asked,* later. Told her I knew for certain, so how about coming clean, was all. She did. She hadn't told me—because of *you.*"

"Oh. I trust you then told her about me?"

Her sailing master looked horrified. "Pussy, you think I'm out o' my frimpin' *head?* Look, I like what you got just fine. But I ain't foolish. I don't rat on broads. If I did you'd be last on the list. Believe."

"Tell Hester if you wish, dear; it can't matter now. Then, at some later time, she would not be surprised if she found me doing what widows so often do." ('They don't tell, they don't yell, they rarely swell—and they're grateful as hell.') (Jock, you're a dirty old ghost.) "Well, let's set our course. What ETA, Tom Cat? If it's later than midnight, I'll relieve you for the midwatch."

"You will like hell, Ma'am—Pussy Cat. You sack in a full night, you need it. I'll put Fred on the wheel now and Hank on lookout—and I'll drag a corking mat back near the helm and catch some sack drill till we get close in. Pussy Cat, you've got to *promise* me you'll stay in your cabin. Not go wandering around—I'll think you're meaning to jump overboard."

"Is that an order, Captain?"

"Uh—yes, damn it, that's an order!"

"Aye aye, sir. It won't be necessary to check on me; I'll be in my cabin, door locked, and I will be asleep. I promise not to jump overboard earlier than *tomorrow* night."

"Pussy Cat, you wouldn't jump? Would you?"

"WITH Jake's baby inside me? Captain, I do have a concept of duty. Until I have this baby, my life is not my own. I not only must *not* suicide—I would not in any case—but I must also keep calm and happy and healthy and not risk so much as a dirty drinking glass. So don't worry about me. Good night, Tom." She headed for the cabin.

(Nothing doing at that shop tonight, partners—we're faced with nobility. I think Anton is our best bet.) (The Passionate Pole! Jock darling, I'm not sure your heart can stand it.) (Fortunately, my dears, my old pump no longer has to stand anything—and the one you turned over to Joan, Eunice, is a Swiss watch among tickers. Doesn't race even when *she* is racing. But you know that.) (Quit chattering, you two. Either of you have any idea how to get Olga out of the way?'

(Push her overboard?) (Eunice!)



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(Can't I joke, Boss? I like Olga, she's a nice gal.) (Too nice, that's the problem. Not a tart like you, or me—or Hester.) (Hrrrmph!) (Jake, you're not in court, dear. The subject is tail. Mine. Ours, I mean.) (Johann, I simply wanted to say that, if you took our problem directly to Mrs. Dabrowski, you might find her sympathatic. *I* always found her so.)

(Jake! Are you implying that you've had *Olga?* I don't believe it.) (I don't either, Jock. If you had said 'Eve' I would have boggled—but would have believed you. But *Olga?* Hell, she wears a panty even in the pool.) (Which comes off very easily—in private.)

(Eunice, I think he means it. Well, I'll be *damned!* You and I are pikers. 'Me 'at's off to the Duke.' All right, Jake—tell us how to go about it.) (About what? Getting her out of the way? Just ask her, she's very sympathetic—and felt my death more than you wenches have.) (Jock, that's not fair. We felt it . . . but we're overjoyed that you decided to stay anyhow.)

(Thank you, my dears. Conversely, if you would like to invite her in—) (Do you mean a Troy?) (I understand that such is the current argot, Eunice; in my youth we called it something else. But wouldn't it be more of a Pentagon? Five?)

(The word is 'Star' today, Jock. But let me give you the first rule of happy ghosting. You must never, never, *never* admit that you are here, nor tease Joan to admit it. Because she might get groused and do so. Whereupon Joan would wind up in a shrink factory—with us along—and there go our happy games. Look, you've been married to Joan quite a while now and jumping her even longer—did you *ever* suspect that *I* was present, too?) (Not once.) (You see? Don't admit it and they leave us alone.)

(Eunice, Jake would never let on. But now about Olga—Jake, did you ever teach her Om Mani?) (No.) (Boss, I begin to see. We've taught it to Anton, Jock. Is Olga limber enough to sit in Lotus?) (Lively Legs, Mrs. Dabrowski is limber enough for *anything.)* (That does it, Joan. Olga will join in, even if she thinks it's heathen—tonight she will. For you. And there is no easier way to get a party peeled down and rolling than by forming a Circle. You've done it again and again.) (As I recall, dears, Joan even used it on *me.* When it was hardly necessary. Okay, let's find the Dabrowskis.)

## XXVIII

APPOINTMENTS OPEN—FEDERAL GS-19 Assistant Welfare Field Operative (Learner-Visitor) Literacy requirement C. Brown Belt or higher gives 10% preference. Veteran's preference, parolee's preference, relevant experience preference all semi-cumulative. See local Civil Service or Welfare office for pre-examinations and salary formulas. Latter based on standard scale plus field cost-of-living factor and hazardous area rating, cumulative.

In a compromise vote today the Society for Rational Astrology



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accepted a "grandfather clause" in the licensing bill before the Nebraska Legislature. The Committee on Agriculture & Mechanical Arts then voted the amended bill "Do Pass" by 7 to 2—tantamount to passage in the state's unicameral legislature. The Protective Association of Intuitive Astrologers called it "the greatest setback for science since Galileo." The Lunar Commission announced that the colonies are now 102% self-sufficient in foodstuffs but added that the ten-year plan would continue in order to increase out-migration potential. MAY-DECEMBER ROMANCE LOSES . . . at sea in their honey-moon yacht. The young widow remained in seclusion . . .


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"—door for processing, Pleasure meeting you, Mrs. Garcia; good luck, Doctor. Next applicant! Step lively, sit down over there—your husband not with you? Or is it 'Miss?' "

"I am a widow, Mr. Barnes."

"So? We don't get many widows, nor does the Commission encourage them. Out-migration is not an escape for emotional problems. Such as bereavement. Nor do we accept applicants so advanced in pregnancy unless there are overriding advantages to the Commission, not the applicant. Take the couple who went through just before you. She's pregnant—but he is a medical doctor, one of the top categories for subsidized out-migration. So I passed her. Might have passed her on her own; she's a nurse. But unless you have such a special qualification—"

"I know, sir. Dr. Garcia is my personal physician."

"Eh? Even if I accept you, that is no guarantee that he would still be *your* physician on the Moon. Unlikely, in fact. Unless, by coincidence—"

"Mr. Barnes, you have my out-migration proposal in front of you. It has been prepared with great care by my attorney. It might save time to glance through it."

"All in good time. You would be surprised at how many people come in here without having the slightest idea of what they are up against. They seem to assume that the Commission is *anxious* to have them. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Nineteen out of twenty who sit down in that chair I do not permit to go on through the processing door. I make it a practice to get rid of the more obvious time-wasters quickly. Uh, 'Salomon, Eunice.' Mrs. Salomon, I want to know first—Mrs. *Salomon*?"

"Mrs. Jacob Moshe Salomon,



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maiden name, Joan Eunice Smith."

"Your face *did* look somewhat familiar but your features, uh—"

"—are chubby now. Yes. I've gained twenty-six pounds—which Dr. Garcia finds satisfactory for my height, build, and date of impregnation."

"That brings up other problems. A woman is often mistaken as to the date—and first babies are notoriously unpredictable in their arrivals. Our Lunar transports aren't planned for new infants, nor for childbirth. I want you to realize the hazards."

"I know them. Need we go into this?"

"*I* must be the judge of that."

"Mr. Barnes, my doctor is satisfied that I know the exact date of impregnation and— Is all of this confo?"

"Mmm. I'll put it this way. None of it is privileged. I am a lawyer but not *your* lawyer. I hear more intimate details from applicants than you can imagine but I haven't time to waste on gossip."

"I am glad to hear that, Mr. Barnes . . . as I would be *much* displeased if what I am about to tell you were to become a matter of gossip."

"Hmmph. I think I felt a chill breeze. Are you trying to impress me with your importance? Don't bother; applicants are all the same size once they come in here. Your money doesn't mean a thing."

"Was my manner unfriendly? I'm sorry."

"Well— Let's stick to the business at hand. A lawyer in the Lunar Commission's Civil Service—a job with no squeeze, believe me—doesn't often find himself dealing with rich people. But it makes no difference; if you don't want to be frank with the Commission—well, that's your problem. But I won't approve an applicant's proposal until *I* am satisfied about it. *All* about it. Now you implied that you had something pertinent to tell me which you class as 'confo.' I don't have to accept your restriction. Now . . . do you talk? Or shall we terminate this interview?"

"You leave me no option, sir. This is not a first baby I am carrying, so no 'first baby' hazard exists. If the *Goddard* lifts on schedule, I have every reason to expect to have my baby on the Moon. Dr. Garcia is not worried about the timing and neither am I."

"So? This brings up other problems. This earlier child—does he, or she, affect your estate?"

"No. That is why this *must* be treated as confo. *I* did not have that earlier baby."

"Eh? You lost me. Better clarify that."

"PLEASE, Mr. Barnes. I am a sex-change and a brain transplant. Surely you know it—good heavens, the whole world knows it. The first baby this body gave birth to was before that time. It is the reputation of my *donor* I wish to protect, not mine. The child was illegitimate. Common as that is these days—no longer a legal concept in most states and the very word almost



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obsolete—so great is my gratitude to the sweet and gracious lady who formerly lived in this body, I would be most unhappy were I to be the cause of any tarnish on her memory."

(Boss, you know I don't give a kark.) (Let her handle it, Eunice; this petty bureaucrat can gum up the works if Joan does not divert him just so. Are we kibitizing Joan or are we going to the Moon?) (Hell, yes, we're going to the Moon! My 'Yes' vote, plus your 'Yes' vote, plus half of Joan's vote—a natural fence-straddler she is, legs always open—which works out to a five-to-one majority for out-migrating. A landslide!) (So let her alone while she handles him.) (If she didn't have that big belly she could handle him a lot better. And faster.)

(Hrrmph. Eunice, you claim you were there . . . .so why don't you tell poor old melancholy Jacques the straight on that? It was me, wasn't it? It was I?) (Jock old ghost, I love you dearly—but if you think I'll split on my twin, you don't know me.) (Oh, well. A baby is a baby is a baby. I just hope it doesn't have two heads.) (Two heads would be stretching a good thing too far. Jock, I'll settle for two balls.) (Thinking about incest, Lively Legs?) (And why shouldn't I think about it? We've tried everything else.)

(Jake, Eunice—will you two please go back to sleep? Squire Pecksniff here is searching for fly specks on Alec's masterpiece. Trying to think up more objections—which I'll have to answer.)

"Mrs. Salomon, I find myself quite disturbed by one aspect concerning this alleged earlier child—the great likelihood that some future action may be brought challenging your disposition of your estate when this child, or some person claiming to be this child, turns up. The fifty percent of estate required—as a minimum—from any out-migrant not of a subsidized-vocation category is a source of capital to the colonies; the Commission is not willing to part with a dime of it once the Commission carries out its half of the bargain. Yet such a 'missing heir' could lay claim to all of your estate."

"Most unlikely, Mr. Barnes, but if you will look at Appendix G, you will see how my lawyer handled it. A small trust to buy up any such claim, with a fifty-year conversion of any remainder to a named charity."

"Uh, let me find it. Mmm, Mrs. Salomon, do you call ten million dollars 'small?'"

"Yes."

"Mmm. Perhaps I had better look closely at the other financial provisions. Have you been advised that, even though the Commission claims only half of your fortune, the other half *cannot* be used to buy you anything on the Moon? In other words, poor or rich, on the Moon out-migrants start off equal."

"I know that, Mr. Barnes. Believe me, my attorney Mr. Train is most careful. He searched the law and made certain that I knew the consequences of my acts—because he did not approve of them. To put it briefly Alec Train said that



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anyone who goes to the Moon to *live* must be out of his head. So he tried to talk me out of what he regards as my folly. You'll find four other possible heirs in Appendix F—my granddaughters. It is to their advantage to accept what is offered there . . . as they are told bluntly how much worse off they will be if they wait for me to die. A poor bet for them in any case; I am now physiologically younger than they are; I'll probably outlive all of them."

"That could be true. Especially on the Moon, one could add. I wish I could out-migrate myself. But I can't afford to pay for it the way you can and lawyers are not in demand there. Well, your Mr. Train seems to have thought of most aspects. Let's look at your balance sheet."

"One moment, sir. I have asked for one small measure of special treatment."

"Eh? All out-migrants are treated alike. Must be."

"A very small thing, Mr. Barnes. My baby will be born not long after I arrive on Luna. I've asked to have Dr. Garcia continue to attend me through that time."

"I can't promise that, Madam. Sorry. Policy."

She started slowly to get up. "Then I'm not going through with it."

"Uh—good God! Is this *really* your net worth?"

She shrugged. "What is the worth of one pregnant woman, sir? I suppose it depends on your values."

"I didn't mean that. This balance sheet— If it's correct, you're not just wealthy—I knew that—you're a *billionaire*!"

"Possibly. I haven't added it. That summary was prepared through Chase Manhattan with the assistance of accountancy firms listed there. I suppose it's correct . . . unless some computer got the hiccups. But give it back to me . . . since the Commission can't promise me Dr. Garcia to deliver my baby."

"Please, Madam. I have certain latitude in these matters. I simply don't exercise it—ordinarily. Policy."

"Whose policy, Mr. Barnes? The Commission's? Or yours?"

"Eh? Why, mine. I said so."

"*Then quit wasting my time, you damned idiot*!"

('That's telling him, Fat Lady!') (Eunice, this is one fat lady who isn't going to take any more nonsense. My back aches.)

THE blast almost caused Mr. Barnes to fall out of his swivel chair. He recovered his balance, said: "*Please*, Madam Salomon!"

"Young man, let's have no more nonsense! I'm far gone in pregnancy, as you can see. You've lectured me about the dangers of childbirth—and you aren't a doctor. You've pried into personal matters with the gall of a Kinsey. You've tried to tell me I can't have my own doctor when he is going in the same ship—and now it turns out that it was not a Commission regulation but merely petty tyranny on your part. Bullying. All through this nonsense—although I've appeared with a complete and carefully prepared pro-



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posal—you've kept me sitting on a hard uncomfortable chair. My back aches. On how many poor helpless applicants have you fattened your ego? But I am neither poor nor helpless. You spoke of a chill breeze. It's an icy blast now. *I bloody well mean to have your job*!"

"Please, Madam! I *said* you could have your own doctor. And I *am* required to review each applicant's proposal."

"Then get your lazy arse out of that comfortable chair and *give it to me*! You come sit in this ducking stool."

"Very well, Ma'am." They exchanged chairs. Shortly he said, "I see that you are putting almost all of the other fifty percent of your fortune into starship research and development."

"It's none of your business."

"I didn't say it was. It just struck me as . . . unusual."

"Why? My child may want to go in a starship. I want that research to *move*. Mr. Barnes, you've had time to look at that proposal; if you hadn't talked so much you could have it memorized by now. Do whatever it is you do. Mark your X, or stamp your chop. Or hand it back and let me out of here. Now! Not five minutes from now—but *now*. My back still hurts. You're a pain in the back, Mr. Barnes, you and your petty 'policy' and your worthless talk."

He signed it. "Through that door, Madam Salomon."

"Thank you." She started toward it.

"You're barely welcome—you ancient bitch!"

Joan Eunice stopped, turned back, and smiled her best golden-sunrise smile. "Why, thank you, dear! That's the best thing you've said to me. Because it is utterly honest. Of course I'm not welcome, the way I've stormed at you—and answered your bullying with worse bullying. And I am indeed both a bitch and ancient."

"I shouldn't have said that."

"Oh, but you should have. I richly deserved it. But I would never have tried to get your job—truly, I'm not that petty. That was just backache bad temper talking. I admire your spunk in telling me off. What is your first name?"

"Uh, Matthew."

"A good name, Matthew. A strong name." Joan Eunice came back, stood close to him. "Matthew, I'm going to the Moon. I'll never be back this way again. Will you forgive this ancient bitch and let us part friends? Will you kiss me goodbye? I've no one to see me off, Matthew—will you kiss me goodbye as I leave for the Moon?"

"Uh—"

"Please, Matthew. Uh, mind the big belly; turn me a little sideways—that's better." She wetted her lips, lifted her face, and closed her eyes.

Presently she sighed and nestled closer. "Matthew? Will you let me love you? Oh, I don't mean seduce you, it's too late for that, I'm about benched. Just tell me that I may think of you with love as I go to the Moon. It's a long way off and I'm a little scared—and I lived too long without love and want to love everyone who will let me . . . any who will love me back even a little.



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Will you, dear? Or is this bitch too ancient?"

"Uh, Madam Salomon—"

"Eunice, Matthew."

"Eunice. Eunice, you're a sparky little bitch, you really are. But I kept you sitting there—even before I realized who you are—because I *like* looking at you. Hell, honey, my wife says I can love any woman I want to—ten percent of what I love her."

"Ten percent is a good return on any investment, Matthew. All right, please love me that ten percent—and I'll love you ten percent of what I loved—still love—my darling husband. Is there enough love in that ten percent for a second kiss? It's a *long* way to the Moon—they must keep me warm all the way." She closed her eyes and waited.

(Hey, twin, lover boy is doing better this time.) (Don't bother me now, I'm busy!)

Presently Mr. Barnes murmured, "Lovely."

"All swollen and fat now, that's why I wear styles that cover them. But you should have seen Eunice—the first Eunice, my benefactrix—at her lovely best... in styles to show it."

"I still say they're lovely. I guess we had better stop this, I've got a roomful of people waiting out there. And you have almost four hours of processing before you go on to quarantine. If you want to go to Andes Port with your own doctor, you had better go now."

"Yes, Matthew, I love you—ten percent—and I'll still be loving you on the Moon. At compound interest. Through that door?"

"Through there and follow the signs. Goodbye, Eunice. Take care of yourself."

(Boss, that's either a new high, or a new low. Was he kissing *us*? Or a billion dollars?) (It seemed to me—though I'm still learning compared with you two trollops—that the young man started out kissing a billion dollars... and wound up kissing Joan. Us. Quite well, too. Dears, I find that my animal nature has been considerably stirred—I'm looking forward to us being back in circulation again.) (Hell, yes, Jock darling, we all are. It occurs to me, Joan, that there must be lots of homesick out-migrants who will appreciate a simple country girl who learned clear back in junior high to kiss with her eyes closed and her lips open.) (Eunice, that's what I'm counting on. Seven billion people makes Earth a terribly lonely place... but there are only a few thousand on Luna and, if we try, we can get to know all of them and love most of them. What do you think, Jake?) (Johann, we can try. We *will*. Wups, here's our first stop. 'Physical.' Goose bumps and indignities. But what the hell? —somebody kissed us goodbye.)

## XXIX

AS RE-REPORTED in the Christian Science MONITOR, *Izvestia* condemned the announcement (Daily Selenite, year 35, day 69) of the Lunar Commission's call for proposal studies for terraforming Ganymede as "one more provocative example of the in-



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satiable territorial aggressions of the mad-dog alliance of the two major imperialist, counter-revolutionary, genocidal powers, the United States of America and the so-called People's Democratic Republic of China" and demanded that the UN Security Council take action before it was too late. In Sequoia National Park three families (or possibly one extended-family were discovered living two hundred feet up in a giant redwood. The group (seven adults, five children—two less than a year old) claimed to have been up the tree more than three years; extensive arrangements for their unique style of living lent substance to the claim. They were booked on a variety of charges but the U.S. district attorney declined to prosecute: "I ain't about to waste my time and taxpayers' money on a bunch of monkeys. Let's chase 'em back up the tree!"

The Iowa State Annual Picnic in Long Beach, California, suffered 243 cases of acute food poisoning (botulism-D), 17 muggings, 3 rapes, and was rained out. "—from the great State of New York knows that slum clearance is no answer. Must we hear the death rattle before we admit that *any* organism, be it man, or city, or civilization, in time grows old and dies?" In a letter in *Nature* (UK) it was claimed that scientists in Novosibirsk had solved both the problem of twinning replication and of extra-uterine foetal development in vitro and must now be reckoned as back in the Great-Powers race with a potentially unlimited supply of workers, soldiers, and peasants. An editorial in the same issue urged the Nobel letter-writer to give up writing science-fiction or at least change his brand of hashish. Debate on proposed legislation for control of neo-psychedelics continued: "Has the gentleman on the other side of the aisle ever given thought to the potentially disastrous effect on our economy of actually *enforcing* the narcotics laws we *already* have? Or is he talking for the video audience?" Experienced observers predicted no vote this session."

IN LUNA CITY Mrs. Salomon, as with everywoman, neared the end of her nine lunar months. Her lovely navel had long since extruded, her belly was an arching dome of life pushing up the sheet. She waited in the Community Hospital eight levels down. The nurse seated near her was pregnant also but not nearly so far along.

"Winnie?"

"Yes, dear?"

"If it's a boy it must be Jacob Eunice . . . a girl must be Eunice Jacob. Promise me."

"I did promise, dear; I wrote it down just as you asked me to. And I promised to take care of your baby—and that is all done, too, already recorded—I take care of yours, you take care of mine. Only we won't need to, dear; both of us are going to be all right—we'll raise them together."

"Promise me, it's important." (Johann, don't name that baby Jake. Call him Johann—Johann Eunice.) (Jake, I will *not* load



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down a boy with Johann—it forced me to learn to fight too young.) (Jock, don't argue with Boss. She's always right, you know that.) (Then call him John!) (His name is *Jacob*, Jake—I won't have it any other way.) (Joan, you're the most stubborn old bastard in the entire Solar System—and turning you into a woman didn't change you. All *right* already!) (I love you, my husband.) (We both love you, Boss—and Jake is as proud about the names as I am.)

"I do promise you, Joan. Cross my heart."

"My sweet Winsome. We've come a long way together, you and I and Roberto."

"Yes, we have, dear."

"I'm ill. Am I not?"

"Joan, you're not ill. A woman never feels good just before she has a baby—I know, I've seen hundreds of them. I told you that tube was just for glucose."

"What tube? Winnie, come close and listen. This is important. My baby's name must be..."

"—rejection syndrome, Doctor. Atypical but unmistakable."

"Dr. Garcia, why do you say 'atypical'?"

"Mmm. Sometimes, when she's irrational, she speaks in three different voices and—well, two of them are *dead*. Split personality."

"So? I'm not a psychiatrist, Dr. Garcia; 'split personality' means little to me. But I don't see that it necessarily affects pregnancy. I've delivered some fine, healthy babies from women who were quite irrational."

"Nor am I a psychiatrist, sir. Let it stand that she is irrational much of the time... and that I see this as part of the total clinical picture, which—in my opinion—gives a prognosis of transplant rejection."

"Dr. Garcia, you know more about transplants than I do; I've never managed a transplant case in my life. But this patient seems in fair shape to me. Right here in this hospital I have seen women who appeared to be in much worse shape... who had their babies and were up and working in three days. With our low gravity they recover quickly. Did you think this patient was hurt on the trip up from Earth?"

"Oh, no! Those flotation acceleration cells are wonderful. Mrs. Salomon rode in one, so did my wife. I monitored them; Joan took it even better than Winnie did. I envied them, as I found the ride in a standard chair pretty rough. No, I see no connection; rejection symptoms did not show until this week." Garcia frowned. "She doesn't know that her mind isn't clear—she's lucid off and on. But motor control is decaying. That strong young body sustains her metabolism—but truthfully, Doctor, I can't guess how long." He frowned again. "It could let go any moment—damn it, I wish I had proper support equipment!"

The older doctor shook his head. "This is a frontier, son. I'm not running down your specialty—but this is *not* the place for it. Here we set bones and take out appendixes and try to keep contagious diseases from racing through the colony. But when it



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comes time to die, we *die*—you, me, anybody—and get out of the way of the living. Now suppose we had all of Johns Hopkins here with Jefferson Medical thrown in—could you stop it? Reverse it? Possibility of spontaneous remission if you had your fancy support equipment?"

"No. The best we could do would be to extend the time."

"So the literature says, but I wanted to hear *you* say it. Well, Doctor? Your patient."

"We take the baby."

"Let's get busy."

JOAN EUNICE came awake as they were wheeling her down the corridor. "Roberto?"

"Right here, dear."

"Where are they taking me? Am I going in for surgery again?"

"Yes, Joan."

"Why, dear?"

"Because you haven't gone into labor when you should have. So now we do it the easy way—Caesarean section." He added: "There's nothing to worry about. It's as routine as taking out an appendix."

"Roberto, you know I never worry. You're doing it?"

"No, the chief of surgery. He's far more skilled than I am. Dr. Frankel. You met him, he examined you this morning."

"Did he? It's slipped my mind. Roberto, I must tell Winnie something very important. It's about the name of my baby."

"She knows, dear, she wrote it down. 'Jacob Eunice, or Eunice Jacob."

"Oh, good! Then everything's all right. But tell them to make it quick, Roberto; I never liked waiting around at a beachhead."

"It'll be quick, you'll never notice it. Spinal and wagonload of barbiturate, Joan."

"That's funny, you called me Joan. My name's Johann, Doctor. Agnes is going to be all right—she is, isn't she?"

"Yes, Johann. Agnes—is going to be all right."

"I told her she would be all right. Doctor, I feel dreamy. If I fall asleep, will you wake me when Agnes goes in to have her baby?"

"Yes, Johann."

"Thank . . you . . Mrs. . . Wicklund. I didn't . . know . . could be so . . wonderful."

"Roberto? Where are you? I can't see you."

"Right here, dear."

"Touch me. Touch my face, I can't feel anything lower down. Roberto, what I bought was a wonderful year—and I have no regrets. Have they started?"

"Not quite. Do you want to go to sleep, dear?"

"Must I? I'd rather not. I feel sleepy—dreamy and good . . . but I'd rather not go to sleep just yet. It's on the knees of the gods now, isn't it? Time to bite the bullet and chin up and all that. But I don't need that, I'm happy. Come close, dear, I must tell you why. Closer . . . can't talk . . . very loud."

"Clamp! Damn it, Nurse, stay out of my way!"

"Everything always hurts, Roberto—everything. Always. But some things are worth all the hurts. 'Tie me kangeroo down, mite, tie



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me kangeroo down!' That . . . wasn't . . . what I meant to say; that's Jake, he's singing again. Always sings when he's happy. Lean very close . . . so I can tell you . . . before—I sleep. Thank you, Roberto, for letting me welcome you into my body. It is good to touch —to f---, be f---ed. It's—not good—to be—too much alone. You have blessed me . . . . with your body, dear. Now I'll sleep a while if I may . . . but first I had to tell you that. Om Mani Padme Hum. Now I lay me down to sleep—"

"Surgeon, she's failing."

A baby cried, a world began.

"Heart action dropping!"

(Jake? Eunice?) (Here, Boss! Grab on! There! We've got you.) (Is it a boy or a girl?) (Who cares, Johann—it's a baby! 'One for all and all for one!')

An old world vanished and then there was none. ☆


IF

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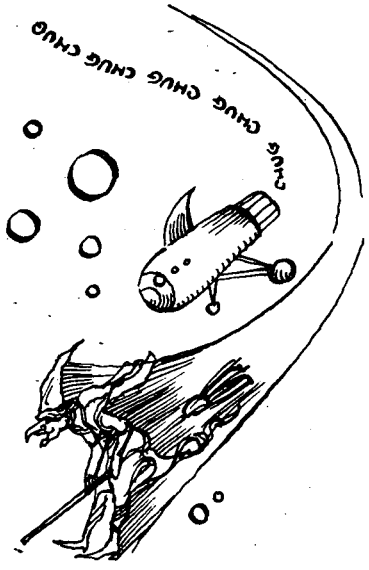
A *GALAXY* SCIENCE FEATURE

# THE LIMITING VELOCITY OF ORTHODOXY

**"When we get Out There we're going to toss the light barrier in the same junkheap as the sound barrier . . ."**

**KEITH LAUMER**




I AM perhaps the only individual ever to receive a B.S. in Architecture from the University of Illinois without learning to use a slide rule. Spurning such aids as tending to atrophy the natural faculties, I polished my mental arithmetic to a point rivaling the skill of an idiot savant. This annoyed the idiot savant, who resigned his post as Head of the Department and became a science writer.

In those days we still did homework instead of rioting. Some of the problems assigned in the engineering curriculum were rather time-consuming; the record for one problem for one class for one day, as I recall, was some eleven hours. As a result we students fell into the habit of working in two-man teams. During those long happy evenings in close proximity with slide-rule operators I noted



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a curious phenomenon: faced with the challenge of dividing 100 by ten, they would frown, adjust the magic device, make mysterious passes and announce: "Nine nine nine nine nine. Uh—where does the decimal go?"

I earned my reputation as a lightning calculator by my uncanny ability, when encountering a tricky bit of arithmetic such as dividing 3.978 by 1.987, to instantly announce:

"That will be very close to 2.0"

I never revealed my secret formula:

$$2 + 2 = 4 \text{ (equation 1)}$$

The tendency of the technical mind to hold the nose so close to the grindstone that it loses sight of the point carries over, alas, into its public pronouncements. Not one to denigrate Science, I. But let's not get carried away with ideas, like, oh, the alleged limiting velocity of light.

According to the Relativity boys, nothing can ever travel faster than about 186,000 mi/sec.—the velocity of propagation of electromagnetic radiation—such as light and radio waves—in a vacuum. Man will never explore the stars, they say, because it would take too long. We can never communicate with the neighboring galaxy because a return message would take a few million years—minimum.

Aside from the fact that this limitation, if true, would take all the fun out of things and also aside from the fact that people who announce what we will never do always seem to be asking for a dunce cap, the whole idea is nonsense. Limiting velocity indeed. Phooey. We'll go as fast as we want to, so there.

I realize that at this point the academicians are laying aside their technical journals with a pitying smile and preparing to point out that at light-speed:

> (a) the mass of the spaceship will reach infinity and
> (b) its length will become zero, and
> (c) time aboard will come to a standstill.

Ergo, the thing is clearly impossible.

I reply that what's impossible is not super-light velocity, but spaceships of infinite mass, zero length and no time. The absurdity of these concepts should be a tip-off to the theoreticians that, although their arithmetic gives them nine, nine, nine, nine, they still don't know where to put the decimal.

So let's take a clearer look at things.

THE Universe is, as far as we've actually observed it, a reasonable, consistent, operating mechanism. It seems to abhor absolutes as much as Nature was once



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thought to abhor a vacuum. It also abhors uniqueness. Once we were told that the world was flat and that Europe was at its center. Then that Terra was the center of the Solar System. Then that the sun was at the center of the Galaxy. Then that our Galaxy was at the center of the Universe—and that it was the biggest and best Galaxy going, etc., etc., etc. This is all bunk, of course.

Now they tell us that nothing can travel *away from Earth* faster than light. I italicize where I do because these flat statements of the crippling limitation imply a Terracentric Universe.

Consider: we observe a distant radio source in a given direction, receding from us at three-quarters of the speed of light. Turning our antennae in the opposite direction, we observe another radio source, equally distant, also receding at a major fraction of this magic velocity.

Falling back on:

$$.75 + .75 = 1.5 \text{ (equation 2)}$$

it appears that our limitation is already exceeded.

"Sorry," the smiling physicist says, with an expression resembling that of the canary which has just had a bite of the cat. "The velocities don't add."

Okay. We'll remember that one, Buster.

Let's look at it this way: Captain Horntoot of the Starship *Clubfoot* takes his command out past Luna and opens her up. Traveling at a modest one G, he soon reaches a respectable velocity; say .75 lightspeed.

Now, we all know that this can't go on or all sorts of impossible things will try to happen. Capt Horntoot knows this, too. No dullard he, he summons his First Mate to the quarterdeck.

"All right, Mr. Shrub," he barks. "What's our present velocity?"

Shrub tells him.

"With reference to what?" Horntoot demands.

"Why, ah, Omaha, Nebraska, my home town, sir," Shrub replies.

"Out there—" the captain points through the front windshield, "is a distant radio source, which is receding from Omaha, Nebraska at a velocity of three-quarters of a light."

"I see it, sir!"

"No, you don't, you idiot, that's a speck of crud on your glasses! You can't see this distant radio object because it's not visible from here. But take my word for it: it's out there. Now, how fast are we traveling—in relation to the distant radio object, I mean."

"Well, actually I guess we're standing still, sir," Shrub says.

"Standing still?" Horntoot roars. "I told you to get the lead out and boost us up to three-quarters of lightspeed!"



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"Yes, but sir—that's impossible!"

"Indeed, Mr. Shrub? And why, may I ask?"

"B-because we're already going ¾ of a light—and if we accelerated another ¾ light, that would be a light and a half—and it says right in my handbook that you can't—"

"Perish the thought, Mr. Shrub," Horntoot says coolly. "The velocities don't add." (Nyah-nyah, n' nyah-nyah!)

If you can't beat 'em, join 'em.

SURE, I know they'll come bounding out of the woodwork to tell me all the things wrong with this formulation; but I'll bet my place in the Public Freezer against a lifetime subscription to the *Engineering News-Record* that some day some dumb tramp captain will get from here to there quicker than a ray of light that started when he did—even if he doesn't exceed lightspeed on the way. And he'll let the slide-rule boys formulate the math later.

(And I suppose that when Capt Horntoot turns on his headlights at .999 lights, the beams just pile up out front like toilet paper spinning off a roll?)

Let's face it, Violent Reader: all this talk about the *velocity* of light is in the same category as the aqueous humor and phlogiston.

LIGHT IS A CONDITION, NOT AN EVENT (Laumer's Theorem).

Light has no velocity. When the sun radiates, it sets up conditions around it. Those conditions extend in all directions. Are we to believe that light rays go speeding away from the sun in opposite directions, all at the same speed with reference to the sun (or is it to Omaha?) and to all the other light rays—including those going in the opposite direction?

Again, phooey.

We're playing with velocities, eh? A velocity implies a time and a distance—but they tell us that at high velocities both time and distance are variables. So—what kind of time are we clocking by? Ship time or shore time? And which shore? Whose yardstick are we using? If time on a distant object, receding from us at the limiting velocity, is standing still—then so is the object, right? And the business of measuring speed implies a frame of reference. A fly inside a moving Dempster Dumpster, etc. So—what is our frame of reference for all this talk about absolute limits? Earth? A remote galaxy, at the limits of detectability? A moving ship somewhere between them?

Double phooey.

When we get Out There, in our nuclear powered Go-ship, and we step on the gas—we're going to Go. We're going to toss the light barrier in the same junkheap as the sound barrier.

Stick around and see. ☆



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*(Continued from page 95)*

*chants*— by Pohl *and* Kornbluth, Roses—as a landmark novel. (It still wouldn't make sense to cite *Space Lords*).

You see? You see what the sincere people are doing to us, gentle reader? I quote:

"Perhaps science fiction is best defined, however, by an enumeration of its themes. These can be grouped into the following categories: *technological gimmickry, space travel, time travel, future scenarios,* and finally, *the exploration of inner space* and *ultimate meaning*." (Italics the authors').

Can they? I haven't tried counting, but I doubt if there is a significant number of sf stories which use *technological gimmickry* as a theme. They may use technological gimmickry as a device of storytelling. More likely, they may use technological gameplaying as a form of recreation for minds trained to grasp subtle distinctions between the probable and the technically possible. But as a theme, gimmickry seems a bit limited, and I doubt if the Roses really meant exactly what they said.

One would have to quote farther to deduce what they mean by such purely personal labels as *future scenarios* and *ultimate meaning.* (I can recognize space travel and time travel as occasionally possessing thematic qualities, all right. As for *the exploration of inner space*, I presume that's stated in its conventional meaning as a proposed antithesis to *outer space,* which used to be a place with an existence of its own when I was in school but has become corrupted into whatever that shouting is beyond the viewpoint observer's ears. But that's not often a theme, as distinguished from a motive.

In fact, though love has labored and scholarship's entire panoply of ready obscure references and suspect annotations has been brought into action here, neither is this poor book a theme, much less a thesis.

THE single man best qualified to analyze the classics would be Poul Anderson. Thank a good Lord, he spends his time doing so only for the purpose of construct-

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ing additional fiction. But if those walls could speak, I for one would go running to listen, for, clearly, that man is without peer as a student of what can be done.

It was a Poul Anderson month a while ago, with Doubleday bringing out *Tau Zero* and *Tales of the Flying Mountains* and Ballantine reprinting *Guardians of Time, Brain Wave,* and *After Doomsday*. These are variously successful books, spanning his range from earliest effort and human concern (*Brain Wave*) through such recent notions as *Tau Zero,* with its Williamsonian effects as a spaceship drives its speed helplessly up and upward until time (expressed in contracting, dying space) and space (as a blossoming function of rolling time) become no more than captive media for the drama of the mighty machine masters.

*Tau Zero* has its biggest problems, in fact, when Anderson tests what I assume to have been his basic assumption—that you can tell a superscience story and a humanistic one at the same time. I think you're doomed to re-tell *Aniara,* and *Aniara* isn't worth telling because it works only as a function of some psychic mechanism. Probably the one that says the good Lord didn't intend for folks to go unpunished. That would be why the moment of triumph is the moment of letdown in this attempt.

*Guardians of Time* is a novelette collection about Poul's version of the Time Patrol. Problem here is its resemblance to a collection of adventure pulp "historical" romances, when in fact it's one of the few collections of time patrol stories that isn't obviously and immediately inconsistent with its own premises. That's a tough standard to live up to. But since all four stories have a common theme—decency circumvented—and a common motive nostalgia inverted, the book as a piece of recreation makes for altogether too even reading.

And *After Doomsday* cheats a little. In fact, it cheats a lot. But that's okay. It's the price of his successes. Although there's no mistaking the man's touch on a story, there's not a man around with Anderson's range. I'm forming the theory that this is because he can actually write a story just to see if one of his analytical notions will hold water. There's nothing remarkable about a professional wirter's being able to isolate different kinds of story, and then to isolate story ingredients and synthesize something new out of them—not necessarily viable, but at least capable of exhibiting a few reflexes. And often enough, genuine life. But to be able to write each and every one of them . . . of so many different kinds. Now *that*, students, is your classicist. ☆



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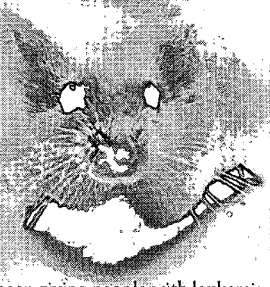

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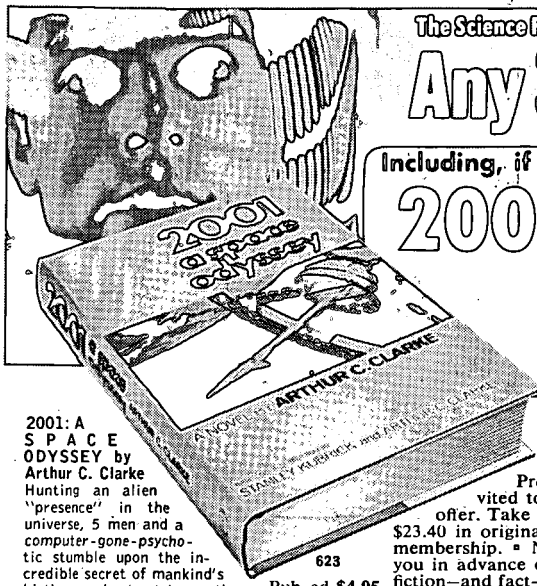


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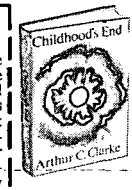


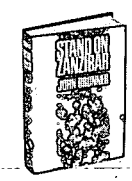


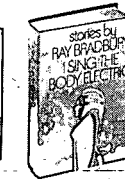


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